THE RADICAL NOVEL: UTOPIAN AND SCIENTIFIC

A STUDY OF GENRE AND RECOGNITION

A Dissertation in
English Literature

by

Robert Z. Birdwell

Copyright 2015 Robert Z. Birdwell

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2016
The dissertation of Robert Z. Birdwell was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Michael Anesko  
Professor of English and American Studies  
Dissertation Adviser  
Chair of Committee

John Christman  
Professor of Philosophy, Political Science, and Women’s Studies

Debra Hawhee  
McCourtney Professor of Civic Deliberation  
Director of Graduate Studies

John Marsh  
Associate Professor of English

Jeffrey T. Nealon  
Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of English and Philosophy

* Signatures are on file in the Graduate School.
ABSTRACT

The Radical Novel: Utopian and Scientific unites two genres of U.S. literary history, the utopian and proletarian novels, as the single genre the radical novel. Since utopian and proletarian novels are the genres of “utopian socialism” and Marxian socialism, respectively, articulating both together is a way of synthesizing the whole tradition of socialism in American thought. Through this synthesis the radical novel helps us to theorize practices of egalitarian recognition, or a radical revision to the relationships, theorized by Axel Honneth, of love, equality, and solidarity that construct individuals and institutions. This concept of egalitarian recognition in turn unites two forms of justice, recognition and redistribution. The theory of the radical novel also has important consequences for literary theory: the radical novel implies a new utopian and scientific theory of reading that would overcome the impasse between “critique” and newer affirmative theories of reading. Another implication is a theory of genre, genre as dialectic, that would resolve the double bind between treating literary history as chaotic and treating it as coherent. Though fundamentally a close reading of two neglected genres, The Radical Novel: Utopian and Scientific is a contribution to political philosophy, a theory of interpretation, and a theory of genre.
Table of Contents

Acknowledgements...........................................................................................................vi

Introduction. A RADICAL DIALECTICAL CRITICISM.................................................1

I. Reconciliation Beyond the Bourne.................................................................1
II. Socialist Theory.................................................................................................7
III. History, Freedom; Future, Praxis...............................................................30
IV. Dialectical Criticism.......................................................................................33
V. Alternative Hermeneutics..............................................................................68
VI. Native Son.........................................................................................................84
VII. Chapters.........................................................................................................94

Chapter 1. GENRE AS DIALECTIC.................................................................99

I. Genre as Essentially Contested Concept and Essence...............................99
II. A Double Bind in Literary History...........................................................104
III. Jameson on Genre.......................................................................................105
IV. Dimock on Genre.......................................................................................110
V. A Solution to the Double Bind.................................................................113
VI. Hegel’s Theory of Genre...........................................................................121
VII. The Dual-Aspect Theory of Genre........................................................126
VIII. Adorno’s Critique.....................................................................................130

Chapter 2. THE UTOPIAN NOVEL: EGALITARIAN RECOGNITION............135

I. Utopia: A Dialectic In Medias Res..............................................................137
II. Utopia and Equality: A Generic Dialectic...............................................141
III. Equality of What?.......................................................................................145
IV. The Republic of the Future........................................................................149
V. Equality and Looking Backward.............................................................161
VI. A.D. 2050...................................................................................................164
VII. The Altrurian Romances.........................................................................168
VIII. A Postcolonial Critique of the “Classical Utopia”..............................174

Chapter 3. THE LUMPENPROLETARIAN NOVEL: INTERPELLATION,
               DEFAMILIARIZATION, RECOGNITION........................................178

I. From Utopian to Proletarian........................................................................178
II. The Lumpenproletariat...............................................................................182
III. Althusser, Hegel, Shklovsky.................................................................188
IV. Recognition in Lumpenproletarian Novels............................................193
V. Bottom Dogs: Recognition as Love.........................................................194
VI. Unjustified and Justified Recognition....................................................197
VII. Material, Spiritual, Aesthetic.................................................................200
VIII. Recognition and Defamiliarization.......................................................202
IX. Somebody in Boots: Love as Equality and Solidarity.........................209
x. The Jungle and the Boxcar ................................................................. 211
xi. The Lumpenproletariat ................................................................. 216
xii. Love, Wherever Form is Found ..................................................... 222

Chapter 4. THE RADICAL NOVEL: UTOPIAN AND SCIENTIFIC .......... 225

i. Epistemology of Praxis ................................................................. 230
ii. The Classless Society according to Marxism ................................. 234
iii. The Classless Society according to Utopian Socialism ................. 240
iv. Walter Benjamin on History and Time ........................................... 245
v. Utopian and Proletarian Novels ................................................... 251
vi. Looking Backward ................................................................. 258
vii. Land of Plenty ........................................................................ 264
viii. The Radical Novel: Utopian and Scientific ................................. 274

Conclusion. UTOPIA/PRAXIS .......................................................... 277

i. Review of Argument .................................................................. 277
ii. The I.W.W. Model of Society ...................................................... 286
iii. The I.W.W. Model Today ............................................................ 296
iv. The Catholic Worker ................................................................. 300
v. Writing and Praxis ................................................................. 303
vi. Radical Novel and Critical Utopia ................................................. 305

Works Cited ............................................................................. 313
Acknowledgements

The Center for American Literary Studies at Penn State under director Sean X. Goudie was enormously helpful in providing me with financial support as I was finishing this dissertation. I benefited from both the world-class resources of the Arthur O. Lewis Utopia Collection at Penn State's Special Collections Library and the prodigious I.W.W. Collection of the Walter P. Reuther Library at Wayne State University; I am indebted to the excellent staffs of both libraries.

I thank the members of my committee for their help with this dissertation. Each contributed criticisms and insights according to his own expertise: Michael Anesko on the American novel of the 1890s; John Marsh on the American novel of the 1930s; Jeffrey T. Nealon on critical theory; and John Christman on philosophy. Joshua DiCaglio and Jason Maxwell were perceptive and reliable conversation partners throughout the writing process. I especially thank Nathan Bonewitz, who has always been my most sensitive reader. But I could not have written any credible thoughts on praxis without the work of my fellow organizers in the Coalition of Graduate Employees. In its work towards establishing a graduate employee union at Penn State, the Coalition synthesizes academic and practical concerns.

This study began to take shape during conversations about utopias with my late brother Benjamin. It is a one-sided and incomplete substitute for the book we had just begun to write together when his life ended. I dedicate this dissertation to him.
**Introduction. A Radical Dialectical Criticism**

I. **Reconciliation Beyond the Bourne**

Amos Fiske’s romance *Beyond the Bourne* (1891) recounts a near-death experience during which the spirit of a departed friend takes an unnamed narrator to a “distant sphere” on which humanity has achieved “a sort of ideal state in which men’s mastery over nature and over himself had become well-nigh complete” (83):

> No parts of the planet were given up to wilderness or desert, but labor had brought the wilderness into subjection and made the desert like a garden, to minister to the wants of the people. Art had also been used to moderate the extremes of climate and to protect the person from their effects, so that every portion of that globe was accessible and serviceable to its inhabitants. Every part was made to minister to every other part by means of rapid and constant intercommunication. (88)

Here we have the realization of the dream of a homelike totality of a world in which all opposition is reconciled, “every part” harmonized with every other. This is what Hegel calls the “triumph over externality” in which all of reality is refashioned in a human image (*EW* 237). Here “labor” and “art” are one; even “subjection” seems to have become synonymous with—or sublated by—“intercommunication.” “Our intention” writes Hegel, “is…to grasp, to comprehend Nature, to make her ours, so that she is not something alien and yonder” (*EW* 203). Human and natural energies merge: “Not only electricity but the expansive force of many solid, liquid and gaseous substances, the force of gravitation, power of their solar light, the motion of the planet itself, and all the active powers of the elements had been harnessed to the energies of this wonderful people” (89-90). The results of Fiske’s reconciliation are astonishing: global control
over climate (88), for instance, and a kind of network that ensures that “messages could be sent in an instant from one point to another, however far apart” (92). Humankind, united by this transportation and communication, supersedes national barriers to become “a great brotherhood, constantly mingling together in close association to the very limits of their world. They understood how completely their interests were one, and every clime and land ministered freely to every other, exchanging products and advantages of every kind” (92). But this harmony of interests results not merely from the transcendence of socio-economic division—indeed, there are no “social divisions” (130); it is premised on the nature of the species itself as “all the primal differences of race and blood have become blended into a common brotherhood…” (112). If this formulation still suggests a vestigial racial essentialism, the sign of the brotherhood is less color than symbolic order, for “There was but one language spoken, and that was formed and perfected in the process of ages from the choicest elements of all the tongues that had originally come into use in various regions, and therefore was the most consummate medium for expressing thought that thought itself could devise.” This is Hegelian dialectic or the subsumption of the world by being-for-self or consciousness:

…[F]or mind does not lose itself in this Other, but, on the contrary, preserves and actualizes itself therein, impresses it with mind’s own inner nature, converts the Other into an existence corresponding to it, and therefore by this triumph over the Other, over the specific, actual difference, attains to concrete being-for-self, becomes definitely manifest to itself. (243-44)

Fiske finds “human history” to be the “revelation of man to man”: an illumination of both truth and justice (184-85). And indeed, this revelation is at once human and absolute, for, as Fiske concludes, with repetition plus an addition, “All revelation of man’s destiny is made by man to
man; and all his search is to find out God” (222)—a quest including Judaism, Hinduism, and Christianity (209).

Like Edward Bellamy’s America, the distant sphere has overcome “poverty, ignorance, and crime” due to the appropriation of “nature’s bounty” (98). But nothing in Bellamy—or Howells or Gilman, for that matter—approaches the Saint-Simonian vision of perfection found in Fiske. All opposition is sublated: nature and culture, race and race—indeed race and the symbolic order—continent and continent (“Oceans caused no delay”; “even this great obstacle had been overcome,” crossed by a system of “bridge or tunnel without interruption” [89]), locality and distance (though all government, specify above, is local “Government, so far as it exists is wholly local” and democratic through an elected “Administrative Council” [125]), even a gesture towards the overcoming of the division of gender essentialism (individuals are judged by “capabilities,” and though capabilities of women tend towards the home, “any of the work of the community that she may like to do is open to her” [130]), even beyond the opposition of socialism and capitalism. It is a world-wide regime pushed past any institution of nation-state, indeed any sense of regime at all. When the spirit, then, reveals that on this sphere “Now there was no rubbish,” he both includes and exceeds the meaning of carbon footprint (99). No rubbish means everything is included, nothing is left over, nothing unredeemed, everything accounted for: Subject has become substance—the external world a home for the self, both transparent and dense with the ethical life of other selves.

Despite its ideological variety from socialism to reaction, the utopian novel of the 1890s is bound together by recognition of an intersubjectivity that overcomes the duality of self and other, the other being anything outside the self, whether it is another person or the material world. As the name suggests, this recognition is both cognition of truth (who the other is) and
acknowledgement of worth (how the other is to be respected). The truth of the other is in fact that of an identity with the self on the basis of a shared acknowledgement of personhood. Recognition is the specific type of reconciliation that Fiske’s spirit conjures for the unnamed traveler; it is the reconciliation that, according to Robert R. Williams or Alexandre Kojève, characterizes the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, or History, as a whole.

Though “mastery” suggests that opposition of lordship and bondage, the word for Fiske suggests less domination than a relationship of reconciliation, of non-alienation in the Hegelian Marxist sense. Or, alternatively, mastery is, logically and chronologically, the very precondition of liberation. In his early essay on “Alienated Labour,” Marx analyzes how, as a consequence of wage-labor, humans become alienated from their “others”: “alienated labor: (1) alienates nature from man; and (2) alienates man from himself, from his own active function, his life activity; so it alienates him from the species” (“Alienated” 127). Reconciliation, the overcoming of alienation, is the end achieved by the means of recognition, or the overcoming of the relationship of domination between “master” and “slave.” The master, hitherto the appropriator of the product of the slave, would, in a proper relationship of recognition, see himself as an equal to his subservient. The product would then, on Marx’s interpretation of Hegel, be distributed equally on the basis of this egalitarian recognition.¹ Mastery over self and other in a sense supersedes mastery in the sense of domination.

¹ Fiske does not go this far. Though it is unlikely that he alludes to Marx’s “Critique of the Gotha Program,” his principle of providing each with his or her necessities recalls the principle, “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!” (However, for
At the start of this study I do not want to resolve the ethical and political problems that Fiske’s “utopia” raises, only to touch on a few to which I will return in the course of the argument. There is the necessarily exclusive tendency of universality that Judith Butler warns against: “that democratic polities are constituted through exclusions…”. Butler finds that these exclusions might produce salutary effects insofar as they “return to haunt the polities predicated on their absence” and pressure the body politic to acknowledge their presence (“Restaging” 11).

But this optimism would risk disavowing that new inclusions would perhaps only produce another division of humanity: this is the worry of intersectionality theorists such as Kimberlé Crenshaw (1253-1258). There is the dissolution of individual as well as group identity to which liberals as well as identity-political theorists and activists would object: however provisional and “socially constructed” these identities may be, Nancy Fraser observes, they are exigent as means of self-affirmation and self-defense in a society predicated on exclusion—e.g., the vestiges of the gender disparity in Fiske’s utopia (Justice Interruptus 30). There is the loss of antagonism that, as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe contend, is a necessary condition for democratic politics (Hegemony xviii). The contentions of Butler, Crenshaw, Fraser, and Laclau and Mouffe are by no means the only problems with Fiske’s utopia. Yet while anticipating these criticisms of a full-fledged recognition, a reconciliation between humankind and its others, I want to offer Fiske’s vision as a flawed—perhaps necessarily flawed—vision of a just society in which recognition is complete and redistribution achieved as well. Fiske’s vision is a kind of primary, ideal model from which a socialist theory of recognition can and should immediately depart, to tarry with the

---

Fiske this principle is still contingent on what in the “Critique of the Gotha Program” Marx calls “bourgeois right,” or desert based on amount of work (321).
negative of theory and praxis, but to which, I will argue, it should return, in a similar vision, some partial, tempered, chastened reconciliation.

In order to study—and indeed, to enact—socialism, it is crucial to study the literature that draws on the *utopian-socialist tradition* to present blueprints of socialism and that draw on the *Marxian-socialist tradition* to represent the process of achieving it. “Literature” and “theory” are inseparable here. The two genres’ modes of representation typically differ in emphasis, but the genres are unified by a common structure of narrative and argument, a common pursuit of truth. By this I mean that the modes of narrative and argument blend in every text, whether literary or theoretical. Yet the two genres of text emphasize different modes. The messy particulars of narrative are the representation of life and the “defamiliarization”—the transformation of the perception—of everyday life. The clean abstraction of argument analyzes the narrative that is literature (and thus life) and calls them into question. Literature and theory are necessary conditions of thinking that presents and analyzes forms of life. Yet the forms of life analyzed here are radical in the sense that they concern organizing for, and living out, a utopian future. This study ultimately concerns those radical forms of life—the utopian future and the radical praxis that would bring it about. Therefore this study will require a close reading of the genre I identify as the *radical novel*. The construction of such a genre, which unites two streams of socialist thinking in literary history, will depend upon a new theory of *genre as dialectic*. This innovation in the theory of genre will in turn require a new kind of “dialectical criticism”: not the Marxist criticism that the term usually implies, nor yet a “utopian” criticism, but a *radical criticism* that synthesizes both Marxism and utopianism in a single tradition of socialist thought. So the study must begin with a sketch of socialist thought.
II. Socialist Theory

A. The Marxist Utopian Impulse

In the work of Ernst Bloch *The Principle of Hope* the term “utopia” lost its disparaging connotation and became somewhat of a term of valorization for Marxists (Levitas 97): “utopian” meant anticipatory of the “post-revolutionary society.” Utopia is still a suspect word for many Marxists, but Bloch’s use of the principle of hope as a term for “not-yet-being” has entered the vocabulary of Marxists such as Slavoj Žižek. Žižek is fond of quoting the paradoxical 1968 slogan “Be realistic—demand the impossible”: “The only realist option is to do what appears impossible within this system. This is how the impossible becomes possible” (*Demanding* 144). Yet he refuses to give any concrete content to this phrase. Thus he wields the definite term “real alternative,” but this phrase becomes a vague matter of “tough decisions” that we are “approaching” (30). He speaks enthusiastically of unpredictable “political miracles” (98). In this sense the “impossible” is what Žižek calls in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* a “master-signifier,” an empty term that yet “unifies a field” of ideology (*Sublime* 95). Given its broken hopes, contemporary socialism gropes for some unifying principle and finds it in a term that seals up the fissures. Žižek’s thinking has nothing to do with the urgent praxis of 1968. He maintains that this is not a time for action but rather a “time for theory” (*Demanding* 32). However, the impossible as master-signifier is hardly even a stimulus to thinking; demanding the impossible could hardly inspire those in the know (those who realize the ideological nature of the term) to thinking. Granted, Žižek’s concept of ideology involves one consciously knowing the truth and acting as if one did not (*Sublime* 21, 28-33). But this split between conscious thought and unconscious (ideological) action explains why Žižek would urge us to adopt the former to the exclusion of the latter, to eliminate ideology from our thinking. The residual attachment to
the master-signifier of the impossible, however, would according to Žižek be a last-ditch form of ideological commitment. In Žižek’s writing there is an ambivalence towards impossible or utopian thinking. Through talk of the impossible, he preserves a “utopian” principle of hope that stands as an alternative to a resolutely “scientific” account of history, yet he preserves the science of Marxism by refusing to give content to that principle of hope. In this study I will show that the enduring Marxist division of science and utopia is invalid. In fact, utopian thinking is a form of knowledge that would allow us to reject the emptiness of demand-the-impossible model of utopia and rather to envision a form of utopia whose content is praxis: “empirically verifiable” just because we actualize it ourselves.

B. Utopian and Scientific Socialisms

In The Communist Manifesto (1848) Marx and Engels argue that, despite the original progressive tendency of the utopian socialists, by 1848 they had fallen behind the development of history. “[T]he proletariat, as yet in its infancy, offers” to Fourier, Owen, and Saint-Simon “the spectacle of a class without any historical initiative or any independent political movement” (55).

Therefore, in lieu of historical necessity, they are left with their own ingenuity to devise “a new social science” for “the emancipation of the proletariat” (55).

Historical action is to yield to their personal inventive action, historically created conditions of emancipation to fantastic ones, and the gradual, spontaneous class organization of the proletariat to an organization of society specially contrived by these inventors. Future history resolves itself, in their eyes, into the propaganda and the practical carrying out of their social plans. (56)

Though the utopian socialists “are conscious of caring chiefly for the interests of the working class, as being the most suffering class,” they nevertheless appeal to all classes,
“without distinction of class; nay, by preference, to the ruling class….” (56) Here is an apparent contradiction: the utopians care chiefly for the proletariat, but they favor the bourgeoisie. Marx and Engels imply that, whatever the utopians’ intentions, in practice they prefer the ruling class, because they appeal to all in a system rigged in favor of the ruling class.

In the introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel writes that “we do not need to…make use of our own bright ideas and thoughts during the course of our inquiry; it is precisely when we leave these aside that we succeed in contemplating the matter at hand as it is in and for itself” (*Phenomenology* 54). Hegel’s language here is perhaps the source of Engels’s criticism of the utopian socialists when he points to “the solution of the social problems, which…the utopians attempted to evolve out of the human brain” (*Socialism* 36). The real evolution occurs when the brilliant solution is left aside. To contemplate the problem in and for itself would be to focus on the development of history and the solution implicit in it. Historical necessity is what governs thought and choice in bringing about emancipation. After Marx, “socialism was no longer an accidental discovery of this or that ingenious brain, but the necessary outcome of the struggle between two historically developed classes” (52). Thus two aspects of utopian socialism emerge here. The first is that utopian socialism is a product not (as with Marxism) of objectively determined factors but of consciousness or thinking. The second is that utopian socialism posits not the Marxist inevitability of history but a free “break” with history. Utopian socialism is opposed to scientific solution as freedom is to necessity. Engels criticizes the utopians for claiming freedom before it is historically available.

Because of their skepticism about human solutions, Engels’s praise for the utopian socialists must be taken with some irony and some seriousness: “For ourselves, we delight in the stupendously grand thoughts and germs of thought that everywhere break out through their
fantastic covering.” Engels adds “and to which these philistines are blind,” but this subordinate clause is a kind of pious qualification, inconsistent with his praise a moment before (Engels 36). And this praise is ironic in that it still celebrates thought that is independent of historical progress; the praise is sincere in acknowledging the extent to which thought independent of the historical progress links up with that progress, almost accidentally.

The utopian socialists are for Engels less significant for offering solutions than they are for diagnosing problems, “laying bare remorselessly,” as Fourier does, “the material and moral misery of the bourgeois world” (Engels Socialism 38). But Engels praises Owen for the solutions which he propounds, because “[e]very social movement, every real advance in England on behalf of the workers links itself onto the name of Robert Owen” (43). Marx and Engels both condemn and forgive—in fact, they patronize—the utopian socialists, for their mistakes were understandable at a pre-revolutionary situation. They concede that “[s]uch fantastic pictures of future society, painted at a time when the proletariat is still in a very undeveloped state and has but a fantastic conception of its own position, correspond with the first instinctive yearnings of that class for a general reconstruction of society” (Manifesto 57). The utopian socialists are finally worthwhile not for their construction of a model of the good society but for their “critical element”:

They attack every principle of existing society. Hence they are full of the most valuable materials for the enlightenment of the working class. The practical measures proposed in them, such as the abolition of the distinction between town and country, of the family, of the carrying on of industries for the account of private individuals, and of the wage system, the proclamation of social harmony, the conversion of the functions of the State into a mere superintendence of
production, all these proposals point solely to the disappearance of class antagonisms which were, at that time, only just cropping up…. (57)

It is unclear whether in 1848 when the *Communist Manifesto* appeared, or in 1880 when *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* was published, Marx and Engels thought the utopian socialists still contained valuable materials for the working class, because their own writings superseded those of the utopians. If the utopians’ economic policies had been discredited, their critique, valuable in its day, was threatened by Marx and Engels with irrelevance. There is nothing world-historical about the utopian socialists; they came on the scene of history too early and, in 1848, were departing too late. But I will argue that a doctrine of freedom, which I will clarify throughout this dissertation, is the major difference between the utopians and the Marxists: a free break with history and a carving out of a space of freedom within the realm of necessity; a freedom of consciousness from the determination of economy and social class; and an epistemological and practical freedom that enables one to know the nature of the future society towards which socialists may strive. Utopia’s historical untimeliness—its earliness and belatedness, or else its absolute break with history—is therefore the point. Utopia is aleatory, unpredictable. Against the cramped historicism of Marx and Engels, in which the utopian socialists are allotted only a half century to develop their societies, this essay will argue that the utopian socialists are salvageable for contemporary theory and praxis, but only through a Marxist lens. At the same time, Marxism will be unsalvageable except through a utopian lens. Both must struggle against the other and the outcome will be neither the one nor the other.

The paradigm for utopianism is Fourier’s sketches for the phalanstery. A sketch of a future society—often caricatured as a “blueprint,” but actually a pattern set in dynamic relation to the present—is a necessary condition for efficacious praxis. As I will argue in greater detail in
chapter four, the utopian blueprint should be distinguished from Lenin’s concept of intellectual vanguardism; utopianism is a detailed image of the future, an image of a realm of freedom that sets careful restraints upon the exercise of freedom. In his lecture “Two Concepts of Liberty,” Isaiah Berlin rightly objects to the dream of a perfect society as having the potential to justify any kind of atrocity, a kind of “ideal” society, qualified by some reality principle, is important as a set of limiting conditions to the freedom of praxis. These limits are most obviously appropriate to radicalism, where the violence of the French and Bolshevik revolutions—their respective treatment of lives as “heads of cabbage” (Hegel) or “human material” (Lenin)—were consequences of a terrible indeterminate freedom.

The inaugural moment of freedom for the utopian is a ‘break” with history; the inaugural moment for the Marxist is a culmination of historical evolution in the moment of revolution. The utopian and Marxist definitions of freedom, then, deserve clarification. My claim, which I shall pursue in chapter four, is that a radicalism, and specifically a Marxism, that denies knowledge of the future is like Hegel’s subject of history during the Terror: freedom in this context is strictly negative, a liberation from obstacles without any positive vision of the good. Hegel calls this strictly negative, terrorist freedom “absolute freedom” (356, emphasis original). The freedom of the Terror is not the same as the liberal negative freedom that Isaiah Berlin advocates, which is a freedom from obstacle as long as that freedom does not encroach on another’s rights. This negative freedom is “liberty from; absence of interference beyond the shifting, but always recognizable, frontier” (“Two Concepts” 127). But Berlin warns against positive freedom—the utopian freedom that hopes for a determinate realm of freedom or post-revolutionary society—as potentially justifying atrocity by way of attributing or imposing freedom on other people who do not consciously want it. Positive freedom is the freedom of self-determination,
the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master. I wish to be the instrument of my own, not of other men’s, acts of will. I wish to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes, which are my own, not by causes which affect me, as it were, from outside. I wish to be somebody, not nobody; a doer—deciding—not being decided for, self-directed and not acted upon by external nature or by other men as if I were a thing, or an animal, or a slave incapable of playing a human role, that is, of conceiving goals and policies of my own and realizing them. (“Two Concepts” 131)

Berlin introduces this concept of positive freedom in terms of an autonomous individual, though he comes to worry about and critique positive freedom when it is ascribed to a collective agent. First he suggests that positive freedom may be imagined and imposed on an individual through the distinction between empirical and real selves, then he suggests that “the two selves may be represented as divided by an even larger gap: the real self may be conceived as something wider than the individual…as a social ‘whole’ of which the individual is an element or aspect….“ (132). Berlin continues to narrate a story of what “may” result from this adoption of positive freedom, then division of selves, then conflation of self and collective. The real, essential “inner spirit” would become

the only self that deserves to have its wishes taken into account. Once I take this view, I am in a position to ignore the actual wishes of men or societies, to bully, oppress, torture them in the name, and on behalf, of their ‘real’ selves, in the secure knowledge that whatever is the true goal of man…must be identical with his freedom—the free choice of his ‘true’, albeit often submerged and inarticulate, self. (133)
This series of what “may” happen as a result of assuming positive freedom would lack plausibility were it not for the fact that these “mays” and “might” have obtained in the Hegelian/Marxist histories of the twentieth century. It is therefore risky to say that positive freedom “might not” lead to these catastrophes. But if Hegel is guilty of promulgating positive freedom, he is also guilty of doing so as an antidote to the bullying, oppression, and torture that can result from a third concept of liberty, which combines the lack of predetermined aim implicit in negative freedom with the ascription of one’s-best-interest that Berlin claims is a consequence of positive freedom. This is the freedom of revolutionary terror that Hegel describes in the *Phenomenology*, a passage that any radicalism that holds “classless society” as its ideal ought to take into account. For this “absolute freedom” of revolutionary terror (Hegel is thinking specifically of the French Revolution, but his point could be extended to Stalinism), is the self-consciousness of the agent of history of the world as “simply its own will, and this is a general will” (*Phenomenology* 356-57). Thus individuals are dissolved into the universal, and this “undivided Substance of absolute freedom ascends the throne of the world without any power being able to resist it” (357). The undivided Substance is characterized by a false kind of universality: “In this absolute freedom…all social groups or classes which are the spiritual spheres into which the whole is articulated are abolished” (357). Not only does absolute freedom break down and level social distinctions, but it goes further to demolish the social order, to effect “the destruction of the actual organization of the world” (359). A dialectical reversal emerges from the revolutionary negation. The empty universality of pure, meaningless death, whereby decapitation is compared to “cutting off a head of cabbage” (360), is from another dialectical aspect a positive, individual, meaningful thing, for there is no transaction between individual and universal, no benefit accrued to give the execution meaning, and thus only meaningful as the
inestimable loss of an individual: “it is the universal will which in this its ultimate abstraction has nothing positive and therefore can give nothing in return for the sacrifice. But for that very reason it is immediately one with self-consciousness, or it is the pure positive, because it is the pure negative; and the meaningless death, the unfilled negativity of the self, changes round in its inner Notion into absolute positivity” (362, emphasis original). Absolute freedom’s revolutionary destruction undermines itself by unwittingly affirming the individual life’s meaning; Hegel thus presupposes a determinate, positive kind of freedom as a standard against which to judge this absolute freedom, “to be a subject, not an object,” etc., as Berlin says of positive freedom. This positive freedom is indeed the Hegel’s positive freedom, and Berlin ought to concede that at this moment in the Phenomenology this form of freedom “may” amount to resistance against, or at least an affront to, oppression. The problem in Berlin’s account is his assumption that the two concepts of liberty are mutually incompatible, when it seems the two forms could hold one another in check: to recognize yet not impose the capacity for self-mastery of an individual as a precondition for positive freedom, whether of individual affirmation or collective solidarity; to acknowledge the inviolable space of the individual as a preservation of his or her rights.

In another lecture, “The Pursuit of the Ideal,” Berlin warns against such a pursuit. Assuming a definition of utopias as “ideal,” he concedes that “Utopias have their value—nothing so wonderfully expands the imaginative horizons of human potentialities,” but in the same breath he cautions that “as guides to conduct they can prove literally fatal” (“Pursuit” 15). His rejection of utopias as solution to all the maladies of the human predicament is a consequence of the fact that “if one really believes that such a solution is possible, then surely no cost would be too high to attain it: to make mankind just and happy and creative and harmonious for ever—what could be too high a price to pay for that?” (15) Two points serve as answers here: the first is that, since
Berlin’s time, the definition of utopia as “the idea of a perfect society” (Berlin “Decline” 20) has been debunked, and, after the theorization of Darko Suvin and Tom Moylan, flaws as well as ideals considered constitutive of utopia.²

The second point is that the “expansion of the imaginative horizon of human potentialities” may very well be carried out within liberal constraints of negative liberty. In the following dissertation I want to offer a rapprochement between positive and negative freedoms. *Pace* Berlin, the importance of positive freedom is its provision—against the tendency of revolutionary terror—of the possibilities of radical movement that avoids the aimless destruction, the Marxist potential, of terror. Only if one can know and affirm a determinate future can radical movement benefit practically from the catalyzing and guiding function of utopian thinking; only if one can know and affirm a determinate future can one safely affirm a positive freedom held in check by negative freedom. If certain utopian ideals can justify atrocity, others, I submit, can preempt atrocity through a humane vision of a classless society.

---

² Suvin defines a literary utopia as “the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author’s community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis” (“Defining” 30, emphasis original). Moylan finds all utopias to be flawed, but only the “critical utopias” of the 1960s and 1970s are self-conscious about this failure to achieve the idea, representing society “with its faults, inconsistencies, problems, and even denials of the utopian impulse in the form of the persistence of exploitation and domination in the better place” (Moylan 44).
For utopian socialism, thinking is ultimately a necessary though not sufficient condition of material transformation. This may seem like a banality, but I mean thinking in a strong sense: the thinking that details what society ought to be like. And, I will argue, what society ought to be like is imaged already in the working of socialist strategy: the building of coalition, the discovery of solidarity in a fractured universality. Freedom, then—a positive freedom balanced by negative freedom—is the condition of utopian thinking and practice that articulates with Marxist thinking and practice to facilitate the imagination, and indeed the actualization, of a classless society.

C. Contemporary Socialism; Recognition and Redistribution

1. Laclau and Mouffe

“Classless society,” as the ultimate object of radical thinking and practice, however, is vague. It stands in need of a Marxist critique and a utopian elaboration. Yet the universalist idea of a classless society, even if made explicit, is notoriously homogenizing, false in its universality insofar as it depends primarily on either economic or humanist categories. The universal in the case of traditional Marxism is economistic, trained primarily on class as the primary or exclusive form of oppression, and a corresponding “universal class” that is the object of that oppression and that approaches coextension with humanity but ends up excluding the oppressor class. As Gregory Claeys observes, this Marxist universalism has always depended on some kind of (usually “bourgeois”) scapegoat.³ The universal in the case of traditional utopianism is humanistic, trained on an abstract conception of humankind, yet this conception is usually exclusive of marginalized and oppressed groups; and the paradigm of the properly human is white, middle-class, male, etc. My claim is that the universality of utopian and Marxist

³ A remark made during a talk at the 2014 meeting of the Society for Utopian Studies.
socialisms is practically and theoretically essential to preserve; however, it also must be subject
to a rigorous contemporary critique that takes into account not just the justice of distribution but
the justice of recognition of differences. My thesis is that an articulation together of Marxist and
utopian socialisms are indeed key to an articulation of the theories of recognition and
distribution: I will call this an egalitarian recognition or radical recognition.

Two important works of socialist theory for the twenty-first century that draw on the
Marxist tradition while trying to take difference into account have been Ernesto Laclau and
Chantal Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s
books *Empire* (and its sequel *Multitude*). Both pairs of authors deal with the preconditions and
conditions for instantiating a socialist society that takes recognition into account. Laclau and
Mouffe’s book is “post-Marxist” in the sense that it abandons the notion of a unitary “agent of
history” that will single-handedly effect a universal liberation from all forms of oppression.
Hardt and Negri’s work, building on the philosophy of history they present in *Empire*, is “neo-
Marxist” in the sense that it maintains the tradition of an agent of history, although their concept
of “multitude” is supposed to accommodate unlimited differences of social subject positions and
forms of resistance. Both innovations in socialist theory, post-Marxist and neo-Marxist, are,
among other things, attempts to theorize a harmonious relationship between the two types of
justice and between the groups that struggle towards them. I take it that such a relationship is
crucial to any articulation of socialism today, especially an articulation that draws on utopianism
as well as Marxism, for, as I will show throughout this dissertation, utopianism entails the
detailed imagination of the future. Utopianism is not content with the slogan “demand the
impossible”; it must specify the content of that future society. I will explore and critique the
work of Laclau and Mouffe as well as Hardt and Negri, demonstrating that their approach to the
problem of recognition and redistribution must be supplemented by a utopian paradigm that will indeed, under the rubric of “radicalism,” prove more congenial to the purposes of socialist strategy than the tradition of Critical Theory as represented by Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser.

Socialist struggle, as Laclau and Mouffe make clear, is but one movement alongside other movements for “radical democracy.” A definition of “radical democracy” is necessary in order to understand Laclau and Mouffe’s theory of justice. Radical democracy they call a “radical and plural democracy,” the pluralism of which denotes the variety of subject positions (“the points of antagonism and the forms of struggle” [11]) that are irreducible to a single (economistic) principle; and the radicalism of which denotes the fact that “each term of this plurality of identities finds within itself the principle of its own validity, without this having to be sought in a transcendent or underlying positive ground for the hierarchy of meaning of them all and the source and guarantee of their legitimacy” (167). Pluralism and radicalism here are two sides of the same coin. Subject positions are plural just because they lack a “transcendent” common foundation. The third aspect of Laclau and Mouffe’s phrase, the term “democracy,” designates “that the autoconstitutivity of each of its [radical pluralism’s] terms is the result of displacements of the egalitarian imaginary” (167). It would seem, then, that equality is the essential principle of democracy for Laclau and Mouffe. This is so not because they intend to exclude solidarity and liberty from their democracy, but because egalitarianism is the principle that links the various positions of the “chain of equivalence,” or the forging of alliances that valorize the constituent movements equally while recognizing their specificities (xviii). Laclau and Mouffe conclude their sketch of the meaning of this new sense of democracy with the assertion that “the project for a radical and plural democracy, in a primary sense, is nothing other than the struggle for a maximum autonomization of spheres on the basis of the generalization of
the equivalential-egalitarian logic” (167, emphasis original). The chain of equivalence preserves respect for the “autonomy” or special value of each social sphere (and the movement or struggle it contains) while maintaining the equal worth of it vis-à-vis other spheres; and this equality subtends efforts at mutual aid or coalitional politics.

The notion of a chain of equivalence, argue Laclau and Mouffe, is the way to “tackle issues of both ‘redistribution’ and ‘recognition’” (xviii). The response to this aporia between two types of justice should be “expanding the chains of equivalents between the different struggles against oppression. The task of the Left therefore cannot be to renounce liberal-democratic ideology, but on the contrary, to deepen and expand it in the direction of a radical and plural democracy” (176, emphasis original). Yet an expansion of chains of equivalence prioritizes inclusion over respect for differences. I do not mean to disparage inclusion but to raise the question of whether an ideal of inclusion would attend to the exclusions that, as Butler has observed, are implied in all inclusions. This problem of exclusion is the essential point of intersectionality critique. I take intersectionality as a necessary test of any attempt to harmonize recognitive and distributive justice. Laclau and Mouffe’s chain of equivalence is a powerful metaphor, but it must be explicated not merely in terms of “liberal-democratic ideology” but in terms of incommensurable differences, of struggles over which struggles to prioritize.

2. Intersectionality

“Intersectionality” denotes both a phenomenon of social identity and a form of political critique. As a phenomenon of social identity, intersectionality is the way in which multiple dimensions of subjectivity—race, class, gender, sexuality—condition one another such that subordination, oppression, or domination (in Laclau and Mouffe’s tripartite schema) is experienced in ways unique to a subject position. The abstract model of a “chain of equivalence” must take into
account the concrete factors of an intersectionality critique. According to Ann Garry, intersectionality “provides standards for the uses of methods or frameworks rather than theories of power, oppression, agency, or identity” (826). “Intersectionality’s positive value,” writes Garry, “can be seen in its function as a ‘framework checker’ or ‘method checker’ that provides standards that a method or methodology should meet” (830).

Kimberlé Crenshaw provides an example of the complications consideration of intersectionality introduces into the analysis of subordination and corresponding efforts at solidarity and resistance. A black woman will experience subordination in ways different from a black man. These differences would compromise simple forms of solidarity and resistance. For instance, Crenshaw discusses the apparent problem that the demands of black women’s resistance to patriarchy are different from the demands of black men’s experience of powerlessness. She elaborates on the point: “Because women of color experience racism in ways not always the same as those experienced by men of color and sexism in ways not always parallel to experiences of white women, antiracism and feminism are limited, even on their own terms” (Crenshaw 1252). Crenshaw does not maintain that the interests of black men and women are finally at odds, only that we should be sensitive to the phenomenon of intersectionality. Within the African-American political community, Black women will have to make it clear that patriarchy is a critical issue that negatively affects the lives not only of Black women, but of Black men as well. Doing so would help reshape traditional practices so that evidence of racism would not constitute sufficient justification for uncritical rallying around misogynistic politics and patriarchal values. (1295)
Applying the point to Laclau and Mouffe’s model, we cannot assume before the fact that all movements aimed at radical and plural democracy will be consistent in their aims and effects. Below in my discussions of utopian and proletarian novels I will consider concrete instances—of a social totality in the case of the utopian novel, and recognition practices in the case of the proletarian novel—that test a specifically socialist theory of recognition from the perspective of the social fissures that compromise universalist visions of socialism. By socialist theory of recognition I mean a theory of radical redistribution of resources that is integral to a theory of recognition. This socialist theory of recognition would have a critical function of calling into question current, bourgeois practices of recognition as well as an affirmative function of urging the actualization of a socialist synthesis of distributive and recognition justice here and now. A model of how this synthesis might be possible will be the burden of my reading of the utopian and proletarian novels.

3. Hardt and Negri

It appears to be a given of socialist theory today that the tension between recognition and distributive justice at least be acknowledged. Like Laclau and Mouffe, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri gesture towards the tension in a somewhat abstract way, offering an account roughly similar to Laclau and Mouffe’s coalitional politics, but still urge a refocusing on issues of class. Hardt and Negri propose a revision of the economism of classical Marxist theory, the view that economic subordination is at the root of all other forms of subordination and, accordingly, that economic resistance can overcome all forms of subordination. Their neo-Marxism attempts to appreciate the differences of the agents involved in socialist struggle. Their concept of “multitude” is the latest update in the Marxist tradition of agents of history. “Multitude” is not a homogeneous entity such as “the people,” nor an exclusive entity such as
“the working class,” nor yet a heterogeneous entity with “indifferently” valued constituents like “the masses” (*Multitude* xiv). Rather, multitude is “an open, inclusive concept,” denoting a “set of *singularities*” acting as a unity (*Multitude* xiv; 99, emphasis original). Thus Hardt and Negri allude towards the importance of “differences.” Yet the aspect of the multitude that they stress is its capacity to act in common. A “wheel that can be turned though nothing else moves with it,” as Wittgenstein says, “is not part of the mechanism” (*Philosophical* 95). Differences—to say nothing of singularities—do no work for Hardt and Negri. The invocation of difference and singularity is pure lip service, especially as they use a certain sleight of hand to call all groups (identity groups as well as socio-economic categories) “classes” (*Multitude* 103). Both pairs of socialists—Laclau and Mouffe, Hardt and Negri—use suggestive metaphors that contain the potential to be articulated with recognitive paradigms—yet they do not develop the implications of these metaphors and test those implications through the framework checker of intersectionality. The impulse to make socialism the central struggle for justice remains, despite its displacement by struggles for recognitive justice. Hardt and Negri claim that their theory is consistent with the struggles of “classes” other than socio-economic ones, but that their focus on socio-economic class in *Multitude* is meant as a corrective to the emphasis on identity-political or cultural “class” (101). I do not want to treat lightly the impulse to universality, which the concept of multitude strives to preserve. Indeed, universality is a central ideal of this dissertation. But multitude is a concept that does not acknowledge the equal importance of recognitive justice to economic justice. If Laclau and Mouffe as well as Hardt and Negri are any indication, the twofold attempt contemporary socialist theory to maintain the centrality of socialism while affirming the importance of recognition has not succeeded.
It is not fair, however, to leave the matter of recognition and redistribution to Laclau and Mouffe or to Hardt and Negri. I cite them not to show the failure of studies that focus on the relationship between the two forms of justice but to show that the most prominent and influential recent versions of socialism have not gone far enough—have not been sufficiently utopian—to deal with the problem. I will therefore turn to the tradition of Critical Theory to sketch Axel Honneth’s development of Hegel’s theory of recognition. Honneth does not theorize the two forms of justice in terms of socialist strategy but in terms of the possibilities of the welfare state or, at best, social democracy. This is an eminently sensible approach that I do not want to deride or reject out of hand. It is preferable to a continued Marxist affirmation of negative freedom that yields the empty slogan “demand the impossible,” a motto that may be used to justify absolute freedom. Recognition for Honneth is ultimately limited to the invidious class structure of modern capitalist society, and the institutions of racial and gender inequality that that structure supports. This is not to charge Honneth with complicity in or approval of those institutions; I want to emphasize that he finds in these institutions the dialectical potential to make progress towards overcoming such injustices. He calls this potential a “surplus of validity,” which denotes the contradiction between the fact of exclusivity of recognitive spheres and the principle of their inclusivity: thus, for instance (to use an example perhaps dated in the case of the U.S. but not elsewhere), same-sex marriage could be justified by drawing on the surplus of validity granted to the institution of traditional marriages (Redistribution 149-50). Honneth’s model of recognition does not, however, exploit the capacity of utopian socialism that, I will argue later in the dissertation, can be both nonviolent and catalytic to “socialist strategy.”

4. Hegelian Recognition
Love, equality, and solidarity are the three terms that are the three forms of recognition for Honneth in his construal of Hegel’s model of the formation of subjects and social structures in the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. According to Axel Honneth, Hegelian recognition is a progression of the formation of both individual and society from the sphere of the family (the source of love) to civil society (the realm of equality) to State (the accomplishment of solidarity) (Honneth *Struggle* 25, Honneth *Redistribution* 140-41). In *The Struggle for Recognition* Honneth presents the essential institutions of recognition in family, civil society, and state. In his dialogue with Nancy Fraser, *Redistribution or Recognition?*, Honneth extends his argument to the issue of articulating a total theory of justice that takes into account claims of both distributive and recognition justice. He argues there is no necessary incompatibility between the claims of recognition and redistribution. In his exchange with Fraser, Honneth makes a significant revision to the three stages of recognition as he presents them in his earlier study *The Struggle for Recognition*. According to this revision, rather than consider the final stage to be solidarity between social subjects, the final stage is characterized by “esteem” for the achievement of individual subjects. Thus, when Honneth classifies “redistribution as recognition,” he maintains that “distribution conflicts” are “the expression of a struggle for recognition.” This expression “takes the specific form of a conflict over the interpretation and evaluation of the recognition principle of ‘achievement’” (*Redistribution* 137). “Achievement” stands in tension with “solidarity.” Roughly speaking, the former is individualistic and the latter is collective. Perhaps both principles are matters of “esteem,” yet the object and quality of the esteem varies according to which principle is at stake. A certain dissonance results between the elements that articulate so cleanly in the *Philosophy of Right*. By making achievement the principle that characterizes the realm of the “state,” rather than the realm of the market, which exists within civil society,
Honneth blurs the lines between the institutions of economy and government in a way that reflects the omnipresent and voracious tendency of neo-liberal capitalism. Solidarity proper, and the concomitant esteem for achievement not in the economic sense but in the sense of contribution to the common good or to the “ethical substance,” the social whole, is lost in Honneth’s shift from achievement to solidarity.

It may be nostalgic to speak of this revision as a loss. The organic society that Hegel describes is hardly available today. In this sense, Honneth is simply being realistic about the potential for recognition within contemporary society. Yet Honneth’s revision is a disturbing sign of the tendency of a Hegelian theory of recognition that attempts a faithful description of bourgeois recognitive structures to reinforce those structures. Hence Honneth’s realism capitulates to the narrow horizons of contemporary capitalism: horizons that were fixed by Hegel at the beginning of the modern era. Rather than be released to the absolute freedom and empty imagination of “demand the impossible” on the one hand or confined by the horizons of contemporary capitalism, one can affirm a utopian alternative that is faithful to Hegel in the sense of its determinate content. Utopian socialism can imagine a realm of freedom constituted by institutions alternative to modern capitalism.

The claims of recognitive and distributive justice should not be conflated, because they demand different practical responses. Thus what is at stake appears to be praxis. It is not a mere clever exercise in categorization that makes the distinction between recognition and redistribution matter, but the crucial question of how one deals with the competing practical claims on individuals and groups committed to the pursuit of social justice—and socialists especially, since they seem to have a *prima facie* primary commitment to distributive justice above all else. Both Laclau and Mouffe as well as Hardt and Negri dodge this issue of priority by
giving a nod towards the importance of alliance or towards the abstraction of singularities acting in common, and Honneth does not engage sufficiently with this crucial question of practical priority. The question is empirical, concrete, and urgent.

By imagining oneself as already participating in a utopian situation—a society of socialist recognition—here and now, one can resolve the aporia of apparent incompatibility between the two types of justice in general and the problem of which is prior to the other. The keys to the resolution of the aporia will, following Hegel and Honneth, indeed be love, equality, and solidarity, but the account of the “realm of actualized freedom” will describe not bourgeois society but a socialist society to come.

I will postpone a detailed analysis of the concrete content of this society and its forms of recognition until my account of proletarian and utopian novels, but I can give a preview here. If both Laclau and Mouffe as well as Hardt and Negri employ dubious mediating concepts that articulate recognition and redistribution—the signifying chain, the reconciliation of identity and difference in the multitude—I employ my own mediating concept in the notion of the lumpenproletariat. The lumpenproletariat, or the category of all the members of society that have fallen out of the system and been “declassed,” is neither quite a “cultural” nor an “economic” category but a something in between. For the lumpenproletariat, a class or aggregate by definition lacking in material goods, love becomes the priority. The lumpenproletariat is humankind reduced to its zero degree of physical existence, and its spiritual interrelations, I will argue, are the most fundamental forms of recognition. They are the precondition for all other forms of justice, because only on the basis of this spiritual recognition will persons matter enough to inspire the praxis that will bring about new relations of recognition and improvements in distribution of resources. The spiritual position of the lumpenproletariat—some basic form of
“recognition” or “interpellation” (distinctions I want to examine in chapter three)—inspires both recognition and redistribution alike. In this sense, to use the lumpenproletarian relationship of love as a paradigm, recognition is the primary form of justice; but whether that love takes the expression of distributive measures or recognitive ones depends on the particular situation and the actors involved. If a sort of “spiritual” love thus becomes a primary form of justice (whether a justice affirmative of equality or one of difference), a material solidarity becomes a way of instantiating that justice. Solidarity, as I will argue in chapter four, is the name for praxis that brings about justice, whether in the case of distributive or recognitive struggles. If, then, there is a synthesis—a solidarity—of distribution and recognition, it is found in the praxis of groups such as the Catholic Worker or the I.W.W.: groups that, not coincidentally, instantiate both “proletarian” and “utopian” principles of socialism. It is only because solidarity (organizing, or the proletarian principle) is the principle of these groups’ constitution (organization, or the utopian principle) can such a synthesis of distribution be brought about.

Utopianism goes farther than other varieties of socialist theory and its theoretical family—classical Marxism, post-Marxism, neo-Marxism, Critical Theory—in its attempt not merely to specify the abstract conditions for social justice but to imagine the conditions that would instantiate that justice. At the same time, these institutions would risk stasis and abstraction were they not articulated with the dynamism of a Marxist emphasis on praxis—the praxis necessary to bring about those conditions for recognition and distribution. Honneth’s triad of terms will provide the theoretical structure of this dissertation, yet I will attempt to radicalize this model of recognition, because Honneth’s model self-consciously follows Hegel in working within the parameters of the institutions of modern, “bourgeois” society. The Radical Novel is an attempt to imagine what recognition and distribution would look like within a socialist society.
Yet this would not be a strictly a projection onto the future; it would also be an investigation of the potential of the present; in this twofold sense, my model of justice would be both utopian and scientific.

My purpose in this dissertation is to sketch some ways in which Honneth’s account of modern society, which elaborates on relationships of love, equality, and solidarity can be made a specifically socialist account. By “sketch” I want to suggest that my arguments are preliminary to the full-fledged account that Honneth offers; yet at the same time they fill in the gaps of his theory that result from his lack of suggestions about praxis—a result that is perhaps itself a consequence of too close a correspondence between his Hegelian “ideal” and the actual realities of modern society. Honneth’s theory comes too close to an affirmation of the status quo. By contrast, my account sketches a model of recognitional relationships that would inform socialist struggle. My purpose is therefore twofold: (1) This model would inform praxis. (2) This model would thereby provide an image of socialist society before the fact. The informing of praxis corresponds to the “scientific” or Marxist strand of socialism; the imaging of socialist society before the fact corresponds to the utopian strand of socialism. Finally—so this study concludes—to image socialist society is to inform praxis; and praxis is the image of socialist society.

I should clarify here that my study attempts both to “clarify” in terms of argument and “image” in terms of narrative these problems of socialism (recognition and distribution, the synthesis of antithetical strains of socialism, and the relationship of these problems to praxis). Accordingly, this study is an experiment with a model of literature seen under a “dual aspect” of both argument and narrative, proposition and story. This dual-aspect view of literature will suggest a relationship between philosophy and literary criticism, as each works together to bring out—and hopefully synthesize—each aspect.
III. History, Freedom; Future, Praxis

Hegel’s philosophy of history gives an account of historical progress. History for Hegel is in fact only the movement of progress. Any history that is regressive or outside the conflict of history is *ipso facto* not history. Marx’s version of such a philosophy of history is summed up in the opening line of the *Communist Manifesto*: “The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle” (2). For Hegel as well as Marx, conflict—for the former the conflict between consciousness and the world, for the latter the conflict between classes—leads history towards a state of emancipation. This emancipation is essentially a reconciliation of classes or a reconciliation of consciousness and world. The progress of history is a progressive subsumption of the other into the self—where, in both thinkers, the self is humanity itself. This apparent drive towards “sameness,” or making sameness a function of freedom, inspires the Levinasian accusation that Hegel is “imperialist.” Such a critique might be applied to Marx were he not perennially invoked as an anti-imperialist. My reading of both Hegel and Marx will be anti-imperialist.

Hegel and Marx appear opposed on the matter of materialism versus idealism: for a traditional reading of Hegel, progress is the progress of the “Idea,” or “Reason,” where the natural world is sublated by the subject, which is the ideal or the rational. On this reading of Hegel and Marx, Marx negated Hegel’s idealism and stood him on his head, making the material world rather than the ideal subject into the determining force of history.

This traditional reading that pits Hegelian idealism against Marxist materialism has only shaky grounds in *The German Ideology* and is not justified at all by Marx’s early writings. There is a continuity with Hegel in those writings. Marx’s writings after *The German Ideology* also lack the vehement repudiation of idealism; the *Communist Manifesto* presupposes a Hegelian
dialectic and, as a crucial piece of propaganda, implies a kind of faith in the efficacy of consciousness or writing in the material world. But this point relates to the crux of the controversy between the so-called “vulgar materialism” of The German Ideology, whereby the economic base is accorded exclusive reality and thus power to determine the course of history, and idealism of the Phenomenology of Spirit, whereby material “substance” is ultimately subsumed by conscious “subject.” This crux is the doctrine of determination, or the relationship between (economic) base and superstructure: the realm of culture, consciousness, and the aesthetic.

Below I will show how Louis Althusser’s reading, or revision, of Marx according to the mysterious doctrine of “determination in the last instance” makes progress towards resolving this contradiction between Marx and Hegel. This claim of mine will be extremely tendentious, however, in light of the fact that Althusser, particularly the Althusser of the essays For Marx, is explicitly anti-Hegelian. Althusser is indeed not readily congenial to Hegel but must meet Hegel via another thinker whom, following Yevgenia Skorobogatov-Gray, I will call a utopian thinker: Mikhail Bakhtin. I will sketch Bakhtin’s philosophy of history in relation to Althusser’s below, drawing the consequences of this philosophy for a radical criticism, or a synthesis—Hegelian synthesis—of the traditions of Marxist and utopian dialectical criticisms.

In accordance, however, with the emphasis on praxis throughout this study, I would like before moving on to the Althusserian tradition of literary criticism to highlight an important practical dimension of the Hegelian and Marxist traditions of the philosophy of history: the philosophy of the future. The Owl of Minerva, says Hegel famously, only flies at dusk. It would seem that this Hegelian emphasis on the past, and the concomitant maintenance that the status quo is rational, and the rational the status quo, would discourage the impulse to social change.
The Owl of Minerva seems key to a reactionary worldview. However, this shutting out of the future undergoes a dialectical reversal in Marx’s thought. The opacity of the future is not to turn our eyes towards the past or be satisfied with the present but to leave the future open to free activity: indeed, to steer a liberatory course through the realm of necessity. A future already determined in a way analogous to the way in which the past is determined would preempt the essential Marxist revision of Hegel, the Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it” (123, emphasis original). For Marx, then, this focus on the past reveals that Hegel does not thereby mean to constrain freedom but in fact to preserve it. In thus committing to a philosophy of praxis, however, Marxism finds itself in a bind between the paralysis of the past and the aleatory future. It is difficult to see how an opaque future would allow for freedom when the past and present take place within the realm of necessity. The resolution of this contradiction appears in the moment of revolution, an inaugural moment of freedom. Here a Hegelian critique returns with a vengeance, for the coupling of indeterminacy and an unknowable future is constitutive of what Hegel found in the French revolutionary Terror. This is a purely “negative” freedom, a freedom from constraint or any ethical obstacle. Such a freedom founders on a self-undermining violence and, ultimately, purposelessness. While for Hegel freedom is determinate, Marx slips into the danger of a terrible negative freedom that I explored above.

One might think, though, that the determinate negation, the characteristic negation that leads to positive content (e.g., the determination of a new sort of ethical life, not just a negation of the old) would allow knowledge of the future, however. Perhaps what Marx perceived of Hegel is that the latter’s philosophy does not preempt knowledge of the future. It is only because, as in Alexandre Kojève’s interpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, history has reached an
end, that we cannot know the future. The prohibition on the future is not some epistemological but historical constraint: history has no room for further economic and political development. If, then, we maintain that history has not reached an end, we can revise Marx in his commitment to the Minervan doctrine. Indeed, I will argue in chapter four, it is (a) more consistent with Marx’s emphasis on praxis, (b) more practically efficacious, and (c) more ethically responsible to abandon this Minervan point of view. It affirms a determinate freedom rather than a revolutionary, destructive freedom.

My intention in this study is to use Hegel to provide a corrective to Marx. That is, I want to use the utopian aspects of Hegel for a fuller, more robust, and more ethically responsible account of a socialist hermeneutic. A radical (utopian and scientific) dialectic that recuperates the utopian as well as Marxist potential in Hegel would revise a Marxist view of freedom as determinate rather than the conjunction of both the Minervan view and negation; recover the “other” from the “same” in an anti-imperialist and indeed egalitarian fashion; and claim knowledge of the future as a condition of practical solidarity: in short, a utopian and scientific dialectic would support the ideals of liberty, equality, and solidarity. These ideals find their instantiation in practices of recognition, the relationships of positive regard that construct subjects and society.

IV. Dialectical Criticism

A. Determination and Ideology

So far I have suggested how Marxism might be revised in accordance with utopianism to make room for freedom and knowledge of the future, two conditions for a more efficacious radical praxis. Praxis is the ultimate end of any socialism, utopian or scientific, but I will back up here and return to considerations of “pure” theory as I examine the Marxist-Althusserian doctrine of
determination and an attendant version of dialectical criticism vis-à-vis Bakhtinian theory and, finally, a Hegelian *rapprochement* between the two. This is indeed a dialectical “synthesis,” but out of respect for the tension between Hegelian “dialectic” and Bakhtinian “dialogue,” and the preservation of otherness implicit in the latter term, I will call this synthesis *solidarity*.

I do not hold, with Lenin, that practice needs guidance by elite theoreticians. Yet at the same time, it is worth repeating what sounds like a banality: that ideas guide practice. Later, I will examine the literature of the I.W.W., which was hardly committed to abstruse theory but which aimed at a coherent and empirically justified knowledge of the revolutionary moment. It is the job—but not the exclusive job—of the dialectical critic to elaborate theory and its relationship to practice. If theory is necessary to guide practice within Marxism, then theory is all the more necessary in the case of utopianism, which maintains that practice itself is aleatory, subject to chance and contingent on freedom in the fullest sense. Untheorized, what Lenin called the “spontaneism” of such utopianism is as dangerous as Hegel found the revolutionary Terror to be.

If Hegel is correct that the path to truth begins with untruth, that one must “tarry with the negative” in order to grasp the positive moment of knowledge (*Phenomenology* 19), Marxism, too, begins with the negative moment of ideology critique in order to arrive at “science.” Louis Althusser repudiates Hegelianism and all of what he considers to be the Hegelian taint within Marxism; he separates the early writings of Marx from the “mature works” by an “epistemological break” with Hegelianism that came about through *The German Ideology* and the *Theses on Feuerbach* (Althusser *For Marx* 31-39). As Althusser begins from a situation of ideology, and then from an ideology critique, in order eventually to arrive at science, he must disavow his debt to Hegel. Perhaps because Marxism tends already to approach society with
certain *a priori* conclusions about what it will find there, and because it avoids theorizing the future, its most interesting work resides in the practice of ideology critique rather than science and rather than the (utopian) imagining of alternative forms of life. My point here is that, after examining Althusser’s influential, and still powerful, version of ideology critique, we can look about for a utopian analysis to counterbalance—indeed to mediate—his insights in the direction, not merely of science or truth but of the praxis that the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach calls for.

As I observe above, it would be too easy to contrast Marxism and utopianism along the lines of *The German Ideology* with its simplistic view of both Hegel and his scientific antithesis. On this view, Hegel makes spirit or consciousness the fundamental ground or “in-itself” of reality and the material world a mere phenomenal manifestation. This picture, in a word, is false consciousness. Marx and Engels revise Hegel by “standing him on his head,” i.e., by making material reality fundamental and making consciousness, not merely phenomenal but epiphenomenal. This view, that consciousness or the cultural “superstructure” in general is the epiphenomenal manifestation of the real, is called “vulgar materialism,” and no one subscribes to it. The reason for mentioning it is to provide some background against which Althusser’s theory of base-superstructure determination may be understood.

**B. Althusser**

Althusser’s ideology critique must be situated within his revised version of the concept of determination, the relationship between “base” and “superstructure,” and the relationship between the real conditions of society and ideology. The notion of a unidirectional determination of superstructure(s) by economic base is generally referred to as “vulgar” Marxism.” This notion is often invoked as some crude preliminary articulation of the theory of determination, but it is not an “orthodox” Marxist position: if there is such an orthodoxy, it is
some version of determination by the economy “in the last instance.” Ultimately, everything in society is determined by the economic structure, but for purposes of analysis, as Althusser puts it, “the lonely hour of the ‘last instance’ never comes” (*For Marx* 113). In place of a unidirectional theory of the determination of superstructure by the base, Althusser proposes a theory of the “relative autonomy” of superstructures (111). He maintains a balance between “determination in the last instance” by the economic base and “relative autonomy” of superstructures: “on the one hand, *determination in the last instance by the (economic) mode of production*; on the other, *the relative autonomy of the superstructures and their specific effectivity*” (*For Marx* 111, emphasis original). Relative to the vulgar materialist position, superstructures such as the educational system are not wholly determined by economic considerations: they are also conditioned by ideological considerations which, though they can perhaps be traced in the last instance back to the economic, operate in a realm of conflict and contradictory tendencies. Education and, say, religion determine one another, or, in Althusser’s term (derived from Freud) they “overdetermine” one another. The concept of overdetermination implies that multiple conditions—economic, ideological, cultural—are constitutive of a given element of the social totality. These conditions Althusser (rather like Hegel) calls “differences” to highlight the fact that they are antagonistic or contradictory towards one another at the same time as they somehow determine one another’s “nature.” The social totality, paradoxically, is for Althusser nothing other than a constant “revolutionary rupture” (*For Marx* 100). A propos of 1849, 1871, and 1914, Althusser asks, “*are we not always in exceptional situations?*” (104, emphasis original) And a moment later he makes clear that the rupture he is talking about arises from the day-to-day contradiction between “Capital” and “Labour”: but this “apparently simple contradiction is *always overdetermined*” (106). He provides a series of concrete examples of
this battlefield of determinations: “the Capital-Labour contradiction is never simple, but always specified by the historically concrete forms and circumstances in which it is exercised. It is specified by the forms of the superstructure (the State, the dominant ideology, religion, politically organized movements, and so on); specified by the internal and external historical situation which determines it on the one hand as a function of the national past…, and on the other as functions of the existing world context” (106). Here Althusser travels from the micro to the macro levels of determination. Later, in his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Althusser will subsume the density of these multiple overdeterminations under the single principle of ideology, which in turn is support for the “State,” and—yes, in the last instance—the economy. The burden of the essay, however, is its analysis of how the multiple forms of ideology as interpellation or subject-formation work: religion, political formations, etc. (“Ideology” 143). In “Ideology,” Althusser reveals that ideological contradictions are pervasive; the implication, whatever Althusser’s own pessimism, is that intervention at the level of superstructures—e.g. literature—is for a socialist a crucial task. So Althusser’s theory of overdetermination and its corollary theory of ideology have rightly become crucial for Marxist dialectical criticism.

In chapter three I will provide a critique of Althusserian interpellation as both failing to account completely for the formation of subjectivity as well as being unwilling to follow out positive (ethical and epistemological) implications of his theory, but for now I want to register Althusser’s importance for a Marxist ideology critique, and thus a Marxist dialectical theory of criticism. Then I will circle back to the issue of its insufficiencies and the necessity of its sublation, via utopian socialism, within a utopian and scientific theory of recognition. In advance of a full critique of the theory of interpellation, I want to read (perhaps “misread”)
Althusser as providing a theory of ideology that unites two apparently disparate traditions in the Marxist theory of ideology: ideology as false consciousness and ideology as hegemonic social practice. I say misread, because Althusser explicitly rejects (albeit with a little pious qualification) the first, which derives from *The German Ideology* ("Ideology" 159-61), the tradition of ideology as false consciousness. He counterposes this tradition to what appears to be his own tradition: ideology as “material” practice that supports the dominant institutions of society. Terry Eagleton draws the distinction:

Roughly speaking, one central lineage from Hegel and Marx to Georg Lukács and some later Marxist thinkers, has been much preoccupied with ideas of true and false cognition, with ideology as illusion, distortion and mystification; whereas an alternative tradition of thought has been less epistemological than sociological, concerned more with the function of ideas within social life than with their reality or unreality. (Eagleton *Ideology* 3)

Eagleton says “roughly,” because he goes on to acknowledge that the two strands of ideology interpenetrate, that the “Marxist heritage has itself straddled these two intellectual currents…” (Eagleton *Ideology* 3). For now I take it that today the “social life” strand is more influential: that, indeed, “consciousness” is no longer a live option of contemporary critical discourse, preoccupied as it is with various ontologies of “materiality.” But very few practices do not count as “material” for Althusser; the term is quite expansive. He says, in a rather cryptic “of course,” that “Of course, the material existence of the ideology in an apparatus and its practices does not have the same modality as the material existence of a paving-stone or a rifle” (“Ideology” 166). Nothing—not prayer any more than sports spectatorship—would count as non-material for Althusser: the lonely hour of the spiritual practice never comes.
Eagleton argues that even interpellation, ideology as material practice that supports social reality, entails some cognitive content, for, “though Althusser may be right that ideology is chiefly a question of ‘lived relations’…there are no such relations which do not tacitly involve a set of beliefs and assumptions, and these beliefs and assumptions may themselves be open to judgments of truth and falsehood” (Eagleton Ideology 21). Interpellative educational practices, for example, may depend on false beliefs about the various capacities of children according to the pseudo-scientific concept of “race” and the contested concept of “intelligence.” I will argue that there is a momentous intrinsic relationship between ideology as a type of social practice and ideology as a type of consciousness. An ideological social practice is a false relationship to reality, where, in accordance with the Hegelian view, reality is essentially personal; a true social practice is a true relationship to reality or “self and other.” A central claim of this study is that, if a false social practice is ideology, a true social practice is recognition. This “truth” must go beyond a critique of the false consciousness of a notion like race, however; for truth, in a dialectical reversal, after a negative moment of critique, truth is not ultimately about conformity to what is the case. On the contrary, the truth of recognition in my sense is conformity to what things would be like in the realm of freedom or the classless society.

This claim about ideology and recognition is derived from a radical dialectical criticism that does not stop with ideology critique but goes further to articulate truth (that begins with the “labor of the negative” and ends with the affirmation of recognition). There is a truth of the subject, not, perhaps, that “pre-exists” the act of interpellation or recognition—I do not want to get stuck in that metaphysical quandary—but that affirms that subject’s intrinsic worth in a way that I will elaborate on below. This elaboration will be a socialist theory of recognition that is an attempt to answer recent demands to go “beyond critique” and say something positive about
ethics (and perhaps politics as well). A socialist theory of recognition, by articulating matters of recognition and redistribution on the basis of a synthesis of Marxism and utopianism that derives from a reading of proletarian and utopian novels, would also go beyond the familiarity of Marxist analyses that give a new name for old ways of thinking. That old way of thinking called “dialectical criticism,” however, has a rigor that needs a brief appreciation here and a fuller appreciation throughout the study.

C. Dialectical Criticism

I will take Althusser and the literary theorists whom he influenced to be my representatives of a Marxist hermeneutic. These theorists include Pierre Macherey, the Terry Eagleton of Criticism and Ideology, and Fredric Jameson. By hermeneutic I mean the attempt at understanding or interpretation that will encompass both the act of literary criticism and the theorization of that act as well as acts of understanding in general. For Jameson and the dialectical thinkers he analyzes in Marxism and Form, dialectical criticism is close to the act of understanding in general, just because of the deep analogy between art and history that he will analyze in The Political Unconscious. “History,” Jameson writes, “is a product of human labor just like the work of art itself, and obeys analogous dynamics.” The dynamics of the work of art thus participate in the “profound affinity between literary criticism and dialectical thinking in general” (Marxism and Form 328). I will primarily be concerned with literary criticism as it comprehends the structure of the text and the content—which I shall show to be both propositional and narratological—that that structure conveys.

Let me consider a few of the most important shared tenets of a Marxist dialectical criticism. The first is the Althusserian balance of determination in the last instance and relative autonomy of the superstructure, a balance that finds expression in overdetermination, and its
attendant hope, always implicit though at times embarrassing for its lack of empirical support, that there is “reciprocal action of the superstructure on the base” (Althusser “Ideology” 135). In Jameson’s The Political Unconscious this reciprocal action appears as the utopian function of theory’s always-faltering attempts at totality as well as the preparatory function of theory for praxis; yet his analysis in Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism shows a more recent thorough interpenetration of economy and culture and a consequent pessimism about the hopes of transformative praxis.

Another tenet of a Marxist dialectical criticism derives from Freud and passes through Pierre Macherey’s A Theory of Literary Production to Terry Eagleton’s Criticism and Ideology and to Jameson’s Political Unconscious: the notion that the economic base is a kind of unacknowledged but ubiquitous determining force and constraining power, such that an analysis of literature will uncover—though only in a fragmentary way, through observation of symptoms or effects—the workings of the economic in the realm of culture. For Macherey, the notion of the text’s unconscious demands attention to its silences and gaps (85-89). For Jameson, the axiom of the unconscious encourages us to look a papering over of contradictions in history itself, for “the aesthetic act is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal ‘solutions’ to unresolvable social contradictions” (Political 79). Eagleton schematizes the relation between text, ideology, and history in a general formula that the literary text signifies an ideological formation, which in turn signifies history (Criticism 68, 80), though these significations are as complex as the doctrine of the last instance would require. Ideology signifies history obliquely: “in deformatively ‘producing’ the real, it nevertheless carries elements of reality in itself” (69, emphasis original). Eagleton asserts, “It is not merely that
certain aspects of the real are illuminated and others obscured; it is rather that the presence of the real is a presence constituted by its absences, and *vice versa*” (69). But a return to the Althusserian idea of interpellation illuminates the point: that, e.g., that literary realism represents relations of ideology; as Althusser puts it, “Ideology *represents* the imaginary relations of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (“Ideology” 162, emphasis mine). I emphasize “represents,” for the word suggests how a novel by Dickens may be both ideological yet signify a material reality. The novel is a representation of how people act, when people are caught in the toils of imaginary relations (as, for Althusser, they always are). One of Eagleton’s examples is Jane Austen, whose “aesthetic forms” “are the product of certain ideological codes which, in permitting us access to certain values, forces and relations, yield us a sort of historical knowledge” (*Criticism* 70-71). Here is an instance of the synthesis of two senses of the term “ideology”: the “codes” are the forms of lived relations, and in this sense are interpellative forms; the codes are also the correlate of “knowledge,” and in that sense are examples of false consciousness counterposed with true. But the “‘truth’ of the text is not an essence but a practice….” (98), the sort of practice that Althusser analyzes. This brief sketch of Althusserian ideology critique is meant to emphasize a certain rigorous agreement among its three most prominent practitioners since Althusser. That agreement does not merely consist in the opposition of conscious and unconscious, or silence and speech, but in the emphasis on the negative moment in criticism, the exposure of falsehood, over the revelation of truth. If Marxism exemplifies the negative, utopianism tends to emphasize the positive: positive not merely in the sense of the truth but the good as well, or the structure of a good (free and classless) society.
The ideological-critical emphasis or usual focus of Marxist criticism is not an intrinsic aspect but a contingent consequence of its theoretical genealogy. Adopting the metaphor of the unconscious, Marxism accepted also the doctrine of the real as inaccessible to consciousness, implicit in Freud but developed in Jacques Lacan’s concept of the real as that which “resists symbolization absolutely.” As Eagleton puts it, “The real is by necessity empirically imperceptible, concealing itself in the phenomenal categories (commodity, wage-relation, exchange-value and so on) it offers spontaneously for inspection” (*Criticism* 69). This imperceptibility, however, did not stand in the way of Marx’s positivist analyses. The theory of history as unconscious is not a necessary consequence of Marxism and should not, therefore, be wielded in order to confine Marxism to its negative capacity or “moment” of critique. In practice, dialectical critics do not always so confine themselves—but at the same time they do not allow themselves utopian visions, either. Besides its ancestor psychoanalysis, the other philosophical lineage influencing the mainly negative element in Marxist ideology critique is Hegel and his twofold commitment to tarrying with the negative in order to approach the truth, which is unforeseeable; and to denying the future development of history, which would never exist and had no truth-value. Hegel could only give a complete account of the truth because he could look back and survey all of history; for the Marxist, however, history proper had not yet even begun. Overcoming the Hegelian prohibition against investigating the future will be more difficult, but to preview the process I will say that it involves an identity between present and future: this is indeed something like Hegel’s own solution. Neither of these Marxian commitments—the eschewal of affirmation, the denial of prediction—is essential to a socialist criticism, a radical utopian and scientific criticism.

**D. Althusser, Bakhtin, Hegel**
The key to a new radical criticism is a paradoxical synthesis that will be *prima facie* quite implausible: an articulation of Bakhtin and Althusser through the synthesizing power of Hegel. If the Althusserian theorists are the most important of contemporary Marxist dialectical thinkers, I submit that Mikhail Bakhtin is the most important practitioner of a utopian dialectic. First I will show the way in which Bakhtin might be articulated with Hegel, and then I will suggest how Althusser could work together with Bakhtin. Such a proposal will be controversial, insofar as dialogue, the principle of Bakhtin’s criticism, explicitly resists on the one hand any Hegelian tendency to synthetic or reconciliatory dialectic and, on the other hand, rejects the Althusserian confidence in a single exclusively true account of “science.” Dialogue maintains the distance between and integrity of its constituent entities: interlocutors, voices, texts; dialogue also relativizes the truth of each and denies any absolute truth that transcends them all. But Hegel, as I employ him (in terms of form as a model of dialectic and in terms of content as a model of recognition), is capable of accommodating dialogue by dialectic, of respecting a voice that refuses reconciliation. While the thrust of my dissertation is radical in its impulse towards synthesis of voices and texts, it is tempered by Berlin’s liberal impulse that Bakhtin shared. The principle of recognition in this study is therefore not quite synthesis but solidarity: it is being, in Bakhtin’s words, ever on the “threshold of synthesis.” One faces a dilemma whether to call an encounter between Bakhtin and Hegel dialogical or dialectical. I will try to show that it is both, eschewing an exclusive reliance on either term but a contribution of both. The principle of Hegelian synthesis—or the Bakhtinian “threshold of synthesis”—will be solidarity.

1. **Bakhtin’s Hermeneutic**

Dialogism is the key concept of Bakhtin’s thought, though significantly dialogism is surrounded by a whole cluster of related concepts that overlap in an untidy manner: dialogue, double-
voicedness, heteroglossia, polyphony. As Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist observe, this messiness in fact shows the consistency of Bakhtin’s theory, which subjects itself to the same internal conversation and dissonance, however slight, that on its account characterizes all of language. Dialogism signifies the interplay between two or more distinct entities. Dialogism is manifested in “the word” and especially in the novel. “The word is born in a dialogue,” and the paradigm of a dialogic discourse is novelistic discourse, because the novel is “heteroglot”: it consists of multiple languages and voices (“Discourse” 279, 263). Bakhtin does not always make clear what entities engage in dialogue. But this apparent vagueness is a consequence of the fact that everything engages in dialogue: utterances, voices, texts, genres, characters, real persons—or the relations between characters and real persons. Dialogue is external and internal to every phenomenon; if dialogue is manifested between the competing worldviews of Ivan and Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov*, dialogue has “also penetrated inside every word” of *Crime and Punishment* (*Problems* 75). And the dialogism of the text sprawls into the external world, not least through the at times antagonistic relationship between the author and the character who is able to declare his or her independence of belief and action from the author (*Problems* 63), but also through the challenge that author and character pose to the reader. This challenge, the opportunity for examination of the self and recognition of the other, is the ultimate ethical upshot of Bakhtin’s hermeneutic. Two parallels with Hegel should be observed here: dialectic, like dialogue, imbues reality “all the way down,” at every scale or interaction among its constituent entities. In a somewhat ecstatic statement of this ontological principle, Hegel writes that “Wherever there is movement, wherever there is life, wherever anything is carried into effect in this actual world, there Dialectic is at work” (*Essential* 95-96).
If we understand the word, the (inter)personal dimension of Bakhtin’s hermeneutic becomes more clear: and this dimension is the heart of his narratology. This distinctness is characterized, in the cases of characters or persons, by “independence,” “autonomy,” integrity, and even alienation or hostility. Independence in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* suggests that the character has a life not contingent on the author’s intentions: indeed, the character might oppose the author’s intentions, and set him- or herself at odds with the author’s worldview. The character is “capable of answering” the author (*Problems* 63, emphasis original). Worldview is key to the sense of personal autonomy in Bakhtin. Autonomy means that the person or character affirms his or her own beliefs and values: in Kantian terms, the subjects legislate for themselves. Bakhtin contrasts “autonomous subjects” with “objects”: autonomy here is at bare minimum personhood, but also the power to act. “Subject” here should be opposed to the Althusserian sense of a “subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission” (Althusser “Ideology” 182). For Bakhtin, “subject” rather implies the positive freedom of affirming one’s own projects and potential in the world. The sense of integrity incorporates but goes beyond a negative kind of freedom. A character or person possesses integrity in the sense that he or she cannot be homogenized with any other entity or subsumed into a general category or class. Integrity is an explicitly political value tied to rights: “What unfolds in [Dostoevsky’s] works is…a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world” (*Problems* 6). In this deep sense—metaphysical as well as ethical—Bakhtin affirms the value of private property, the possession of one’s own person and the full range of rights this possession implies. For this reason he counts alongside Berlin as a liberal counterbalance to the Hegelian and Marxian tendency to disregard “bourgeois” rights.
At the same time, the “integral person” (*Problems* 10) is characterized by “unfinalizability”. The Underground Man is representative here: “His consciousness of self lives by its unfinalizability, by its unclosedness and its indeterminacy [sic]” (*Problems* 53). He exemplifies the “internally unfinalizable something in man” or the “unfinalizable and inexhaustible ‘man in man’” (*Problems* 58, 86). Integrity does not imply wholeness but rather a non-identity with oneself, for a “man never coincides with himself” (*Problems* 59). One is always in the process of becoming, and it is a violation of a person’s integrity to declare a full comprehension, a total recognition, of that person. Recognition is not a full knowledge but (to recall something like Stanley Cavell’s distinction) an acknowledgement of the impossibility of that knowledge: and an affirmation of that impossibility as salutary, just because acknowledgement is an attitude of cognitive knowing (Cavell 263). This may be called Bakhtin’s version of recognition, but it is starkly different from a standard understanding of Hegelian recognition, whereby the other is always subsumed into the self. But Judith Butler presents the standard view and notes a plausible alternative understanding:

The Hegelian other is always found outside: at least, it is *first* found outside and only later recognized to be constitutive of the subject. This has led some critics of Hegel to conclude that the Hegelian subject effects a wholesale assimilation of what is external into a set of features internal to itself, that its characteristic gesture is one of *appropriation* and its style that of imperialism. Other readings of Hegel, however, insist that the relation to the other is ecstatic, that the “I” repeatedly finds itself outside itself, and that nothing can put an end to the repeated upsurge of this exteriority that is, paradoxically, my own. I am, as it
were, always other to myself, and there is no final moment in which my return to myself takes place. (*Giving* 27, emphasis original)

This latter interpretation, which accords with the Bakhtinian rejection of self-identity and the recentering of self in the other, finds confirmation in the passage of the *Phenomenology*’s preface cited above: that Spirit “is just this movement of becoming an other to itself” (21, emphasis original). I quote Butler here not merely for the eloquence with which she draws the distinction between the two readings of Hegel but for (a) the consonance of the latter reading with Bakhtinian doctrine and (b) the usefulness of this distinction in showing what indeed such a doctrine of recognition would look like. The other-centered reading of Hegel may or may not be faithful to the *Phenomenology*. But it may be said to be faithful to a Hegel who has been challenged or chastened by a dialogue—a dialectic—with Bakhtin. If I do not want ultimately to decide between dialogue and dialectic here as a concept of synthesis and therefore offer a third concept, *solidarity*, which has the virtue of being a political ideal, a goal of recognition, and a sort of synthesis that does not demolish particularity, difference, dissent, and openness to the future.

And, if Butler’s Hegel appears already to be congenial to the ideal of solidarity, so does Bakhtin, for entities in his dialogic encounter maintain integrity while interpenetrating one another or intertwining. Each such encounter is a threat to integrity, independence, and autonomy yet ultimately a preservation of them. Here Bakhtin’s doctrine about the word is relevant, for “the word in language is half someone else’s” (“Discourse” 293). Words in the novel are “double-voiced,” imbued with the intentions of more than one language-user (e.g., the speaker and the listener) (“Discourse” 324). The word for this apparent ambiguity is precise: “threshold.” Bakhtin uses this word several times in the course of *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. It means
the redemptive preservation of the individual against some threat to his or her integrity. The most salient use of “threshold” comes in the expression the “threshold of synthesis.”

2. On the Threshold of Synthesis: Dialogue and Dialectic

To announce an alliance between Bakhtin and Hegel at this point, however, would be premature, because Bakhtin is openly on guard against a certain totalitarian understanding of Hegel. Thus Bakhtin rejects the “monologic” conception of a “single consciousness: the spirit of a nation, the spirit of a people, the spirit of history, and so forth” (Problems 82). This conception Bakhtin connects with a homogenizing and monologic rationalism, which also characterizes “utopian socialism, with its faith in the omnipotence of the conviction” (Problems 82). (One of the burdens of my discussion of utopian socialism, then, will be to call into question this faith in conviction, insofar as the convictions fail both to live up to their promises and to issue in effective praxis.)

The ideas in a novel (and the example at hand that Bakhtin has been discussing is The Brothers Karamazov) are characteristic of characters’ different “worlds and planes” and therefore “are in no sense present in the novel as links in a unified dialectical sequence” (Problems 25). Unless the novel is “a philosophical novel,” it would refuse this sequence. Otherwise, the “ultimate link in the dialectical sequence would inevitably turn out to be the author’s synthesis—which would then cancel out all preceding links as abstract and totally superseded.

This is not in fact what happens. In none of Dostoevsky’s novels is there any evolution of a unified spirit; in fact there is no evolution, no growth in general, precisely to the degree that there is none in tragedy….Each novel
presents an opposition, which is never cancelled out dialectically, of many consciousnesses, and they do not merge in the unity of an evolving spirit, just as souls and spirits do not merge in the formally polyphonic world of Dante.

*(Problems 26)*

Dialogue is a principle of breakage and discontinuity rather than continuous development and reconciliation. Whereas at times Bakhtin emphasizes an antagonism internal to the word and thus the one who wields the word, in his analysis of Dostoevsky he locates antagonism at the level of “the objective social world” *(Problems 27)*. The novel represents this “condition of society” rather than “the spirit”; “opposing camps” rather than stages of evolution (27, emphasis original). Yet while insisting that the novel dramatizes social antagonism, Bakhtin also emphasizes that the novel is a totality, a “whole.” This is not a seamless or absolutely coherent whole, but a totality internally articulated by dialogue: “Thus all relationships among external and internal parts and elements of [Dostoevsky’s] novel are dialogic in character, and he structured the novel as a whole as a “great dialogue” *(Problems 40, emphasis original)*. Thus the “intense dialogic life” in *The Brothers Karamazov* surrounding the proposition that, if God does not exist, “everything is permitted” *(Problems 89)*. This dialogue does not attain a closed totality or synthesis, for the “great dialogue in Dostoevsky is organized as an unclosed whole of life itself, life poised on the threshold” *(Problems 63)*. “Threshold,” then, deserves some clarification. For the young Georg Lukács, the novel was metaphysically distinct from the epic. The latter rendered a world in which Homer’s mimesis was at one with the life it imitated: signifier, signified, and referent were contained in a familiar “rounded world” *(Lukács Theory 33)*. The world was homelike in its comprehensibility. Yet the “novel form is, like no other, the expression of this transcendental homelessness” after humankind had been expelled from the rounded world *(Theory 41)*, the
dialogue of the modern epic or novel is as close that humankind gets to reestablishing a homelike totality; through its dialogism the novel brings one to the threshold of synthesis. If read in the terms of the Hegelian Lukács “threshold” connotes being on the verge of unity, not only among signifier, signified, and referent; or between knower and known; but between the duality that characterizes dialogue itself.

Yet elsewhere, “threshold” suggests being on the cusp of some decisive event. “In Dostoevsky,” Bakhtin writes, “the participants in the act stand on the threshold (on the threshold of life and death, falsehood and truth, sanity and insanity)” (Problems 147, emphasis original). Bakhtin has already written of a Socratic “dialogue on the threshold” of some momentous event such as “the situation of impending death” (Problems 111, emphasis original). It is a mistake, however, to see such an event as inconsistent with a Hegelian logic, for the event is what Hegel calls a “qualitative leap,” the famous transition from quantity to quality. In a passage that glances back to an old world “whose tottering state is only hinted at by isolated symptoms”—perhaps the fissures to which Lukács alludes—, Hegel anticipates a “new era” (Phenomenology 6):

…it is not difficult to see that ours is a birth-time and a period of transition to a new era. Spirit has broken with the world it has hitherto inhabited and imagined, and is of a mind to submerge it in the past, and in the labour of its own transformation. Spirit is indeed never at rest but always engaged in moving forward. But just as the first breath drawn by a child after its long, quiet nourishment breaks the gradualness of merely quantitative growth—there is a qualitative leap, and the child is born…. (Phenomenology 6-7)
Hegel goes on speak of this “new world,” however, not as a reconciled totality but as only apparent in its “simplicity” or homogeneity. The new world will soon be afflicted by similar symptoms—the introduction of difference, antagonism, negation, duality—that characterized the threshold, though its horizon is always again a simple whole. The “actuality of this simple whole consists in those various shapes and forms which have become its moments, and which will now develop and take shape afresh, this time in their new element, in their newly acquired meaning” (*Phenomenology* 7). For Bakhtin, dialectical opposition seems to appear in the context of a qualitative break, for instance, in the medieval carnival whose antagonistic dynamics prefigured the dialogism of the novel. The carnival manifested itself officially and intermittently in the medieval period, then burst out unofficially throughout society during the Renaissance. Out of this liberated culture arose the “carnival image” in the novel. In a strikingly Hegelian movement of becoming driven by opposition, the carnival image

strives to encompass and unite within itself both poles of becoming or both members of an antithesis: birth-death, youth-old age, top-bottom, face-backside, praise-abuse, affirmation-repudiation, tragic-comic, and so forth….It could be expressed in this way: opposites come together, look at one another, are reflected in one another, know and understand one another. *(Problems* 176).

A problem with Bakhtin’s position is that he does assert a dialectical “whole,” only it is small-scale: the process of becoming, the non-identity in the case of an individual subject. The danger that Bakhtin wants to avoid is to posit a collective subject, a spirit, but his exploration of the individual subject, and its interrelation with other subjects (whether in alienation or solidarity) takes him to the very “borderline of dialogically intersecting consciousnesses” *(Problems* 91). Bakhtin’s reduction of the dialectical whole to the individual subject, and his simultaneous
assertion that that subject is caught up in—indeed penetrated by—relationships with other subjects, makes his philosophy fundamentally ethical rather than political. That is, Bakhtin emphasizes the face-to-face, interpersonal rather than the collective and anonymous relations that characterize Marxist politics. The two are not inconsistent. For my radical hermeneutic, dialogue is to ethics as dialectic is to politics; the tendencies of the two complement one another as they hold one another in check. Bakhtin acknowledges the ethical agency of the individual and Althusser the political capacity of subjects in relationships of overdetermination with one another. Bakhtin’s liberalism holds in check the tendency of Marxism to take the individual as “human material,” and Marxism challenges Bakhtin’s liberalism to a horizon of solidarity farther than the focus on the singular human subject.

I have called utopianism a “break with history” rather than a development out of history. A couple of distinctions must be made here. Bakhtin’s utopianism must be carefully distinguished from Althusser’s “exceptional situation.” On the face of it, the exceptional situation seems to be just what Althusser insists it is: a “rupture” with history. Yet, however paradigmatic 1789 or 1871 appear, Althusser’s theory is overwhelmingly preoccupied with the reproduction of the exceptional situation of the ideological status quo. Bakhtin’s rupture tears History apart; Althusser’s rupture leaves History seamless and buoyant. And Bakhtin’s utopian break is equally inconsistent with the notion of the transition from quantity to quality, for this latter notion remains a break ruled by an unbroken logic. The philosophy of history that Bakhtin presents in *Rabelais and His World* implies two intermittently intersecting histories: the grand and official narrative of History on the one hand and the usually faint but occasionally riotous “history of laughter” on the other. Laughter in its “spontaneous, elemental” aspect erupted throughout the “official culture of the Middle Ages” in the carnival holiday and created a
revolution in its image with the coming of the Renaissance (Rabelais 95, 274). Its approach to history was a vision of the future: “Laughter opened men’s eyes on that which is new, on the future” (Rabelais 94). Laughter was not merely the everyday occurrence of jokes but “the social consciousness of the people,” “cosmic and universal” (Rabelais 92, 318). It was embodied and contained in the carnivals of the medieval period but released to transform history in the culture of the Renaissance, a culture marked by the uproarious celebration of the body in the novels of Rabelais. Laughter was and is a principle of freedom, its “truth” set against the ideology associated with the “official sphere of life,” a totality of authority and unfreedom, buttressed by fear (Rabelais 71). Laughter was a claim to liberty and fearlessness (Rabelais 47, 90). This liberty is not the mere liberal freedom from impediment, nor the violent revolutionary absolute freedom, but a positive freedom of the body, affirmative in its wholeness and subversive in its antagonism and openness. The “grotesque body” in Rabelais represents the “body as a whole and of the limits of the whole,” “a body in the act of becoming” that “is never finished, never completed…” (Rabelais 317).

If History is finally the realm of Spirit, what is the ontology of this history of laughter? Bakhtin is known as a theorist of the body. As I noted above, Bakhtin contrasted the “stages” of “the spirit” with the “condition of society.” But it is important to hold in mind two aspects of laughter: it is “the social consciousness of all the people” but manifests itself in the “cosmic and universal” imagery of the “grotesque body,” Rabelais’s figure for the being and becoming of the world (Rabelais 92, 317-18). Like Hegel, Bakhtin makes no ultimate dualistic split between consciousness and the body. The word is a spiritual thing, as is laughter, but, in the manner of Hegel, the spiritual thing imbues the material. “The word,” maintains Bakhtin,
Is not a material thing but rather the eternally mobile, eternally fickle medium of
dialogic interaction. It never gravitates toward a single consciousness or a single
voice. The life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another,
from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from
one generation to another generation. In this process the word does not forget its
own path and cannot completely free itself from the power of these concrete
contexts into which it has entered. (Problems 202)

These concrete contexts, material and time-bound, carry the fickle eternal word much as
the world carries the ever-morphing shapes of Spirit. The figure of the cosmic body, as the
cosmic embodiment of the consciousness of laughter, is like the circular path of Spirit, and, like
Spirit, it strives towards reconciliation without achieving it.

Taken in the context of Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, Bakhtin’s history of laughter
becomes an instance of a dialogical philosophy of history that breaks with official history. For
Bakhtin, writing under the Stalinist regime, official History was indeed Hegelian and Marxist;
writing a history of laughter that affirmed the fearless, subversive, utopian truth of humanist
culture was but one oblique way of raising an objection to official culture. The burden of
Bakhtin’s work, his break with history, is his analysis of the novel, whether works of Rabelais
or Dostoevsky, and at the heart of that analysis is his dialogical view of the human subject:
autonomous yet caught up in a web of relations with others. Bakhtin’s work, by taking
Dostoevsky or Rabelais and making them paradigmatic of a whole genre and indeed of a whole
anthropology and ethics, may be called (a critical anathema) “ahistorical,” but the historicism to
which Bakhtin objects is the historicism of Stalinism. But a synthesis—a solidarity—of Hegel
and Bakhtin would require a break, not a transition, between quantity and quality. Despite the
paradigmatic status of this or that author, Bakhtin tells a series of stories as violations of History as such, and, just as dialectic of the subject may be called into question by a dialogical critique along the lines of Butler’s alternative, ecstatic or other-centered reading of the dialectic, so the dialectic of History may be refashioned in the image of oppositional histories: the history of laughter, the history of the novel, and the radical novel in particular.

3. **Bakhtin and Althusser on Ideology**

A solidarity between dialectic and dialogue—Hegel and Bakhtin—is an alliance against the History of Stalinism that affirms the history of laughter, the history of the novel. Yet that solidarity does not just undermine or critique; it also asserts, and what it asserts is truth. So I return to the problem of Marxism’s neglect of positive assertion in favor of ideology critique. In order to overcome this Marxian problem, the Althusserian notion of ideology needs to be brought into conversation with the Bakhtinian version of that concept. A theory of ideology implies a theory of truth, and therefore it is incumbent on dialectical critics to articulate what they mean by truth. I will give a sketch of this theory of truth here, but reserve a more rigorous and extended analysis for chapter two.

There is a curious opposition between Althusser’s and Bakhtin’s concepts of ideology. Althusser implies that ideology, and therefore mystification, is pervasive and total. Bakhtin suggests that ideology, and therefore truth, is ubiquitous. The two use the words in very different ways, but the word stems from a common Marxian, Hegelian tradition, so investigating the source and significance of this contradiction will prove fruitful.

First, I need to return to the claim that Althusser’s concept of ideology implies mystification or false consciousness, because Althusser seems to reject this idea, drawing a firm
distinction between the false-consciousness concept of ideology and his sociological or Gramscian concept of ideology. The latter concept is of practices embedded in “imaginary relations of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Althusser “Ideology” 162). Yet to return to Eagleton’s point, such a definition depends on certain propositional beliefs, most crucially the belief in the unfettered negative freedom (rather than subjected status) of the subject and the belief in the imaginary wholeness (rather than alienated status) of that subject in the relation to its world. These beliefs are claims about reality that guide action.

For Bakhtin, ideology at first appears to mean something like belief and value system or worldview. An ideology is always relative to a particular language: “Every language in the novel is a point of view, a socio-ideological conceptual system of real social groups and their embodied representations” (“Discourse” 411). Ideology here just designates the belief and value system of a particular group. Yet ideology may be more particular and exclusive than that of a group, for Bakhtin speaks of the ideal Dostoevsky character as “ideologically authoritative and independent” (Problems 5). Ideology in this sense seems person-relative rather than group or class-relative, as in Marx. Thus in Dostoevsky there is no “merging” of his and his characters’ ideologies (Problems 85). So far, then, “ideology” signifies only a group- or individual-relative belief and value system or worldview. However, Bakhtin smuggles a theory of truth into this theory of ideology. Ideology is neither false consciousness nor imaginary practice. Rather, it is—at least in certain cases—inquiry into the truth. Socrates and his interlocutors, for example, are “ideologists” (Problems 111). Bakhtin makes clear that the Socratic dialogism produces truth, not illusion (110). Indeed, participants in the Platonic dialogue engage in “the purely ideological event of seeking and testing truth” (111, emphasis original). Here an ambiguity enters Bakhtin’s exposition: truth as discovery versus truth as invention. Socrates’s method presupposes “the
dialogic nature of truth,” which he contrasts to “official monologism, which pretends to possess a ready-made truth” (Problems 110, emphasis original). This dialogic truth “is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction” (110, emphasis original). Two ambiguities arise, then. The first is that “seeking” truth turns out in the case of the dialogic encounter to be not seeking a preexistent truth (though this must happen too, in “official” contexts) but seeking a truth that is “born” in the encounter. The second is that the person- or group-relative nature of truth turns out in fact to be relationship-relative. Yet the tension between seeking and producing is a recalcitrant ambiguity in Bakhtin’s concept of truth, not resolved by his allusion to the image of Socrates as “midwife” (110). Bakhtin’s concept of truth is more radical than this metaphor would require, for there is no “ready-made” referent to which a dialogue would have to conform in order to be true. It may be objected that such a position is dangerously relativistic. Thus Bakhtin does not talk about falsity but of two different kinds of truth: ready-made and dialogic. Yet this is the utopianism of his theory of truth: truth as an imaginary relation to the real conditions of existence is itself a transformation of those conditions. Truth in Bakhtin’s dialogue is not “adequation” or conformity between thought and being (or conformity of consciousness with body) but a transformation of being in the image of dialogue. Bakhtin can part ways with an Althusserian conception of ideology critique and assert the identity of “ideology” and truth precisely because ideology-as-truth is produced by relationships—precisely because a relationship is itself a “mode of production” of the real.

Thus, while for both thinkers all relationships are necessarily ideological, for Althusser ideology is necessarily illusory or false, while for Bakhtin ideology is potentially true. What does an articulation of these two positions amount to? Althusser would insist against Bakhtin that
truth is not entirely relative to a relationship, for then there could be mutually exclusive truths; Althusser would maintain a “real” that is not relative to this or that mutually exclusive form of relationship. But Bakhtin might reply that the possibility of relationships producing truth—as opposed to “ready-made” truth (the truth of the ideological state apparatuses)—would actually compliment the notion of overdetermination: “superstructures” as themselves modes of production of the real. And this dialogue between Althusser and Bakhtin would produce a view of ideology and truth that would admit a non-ideological intersubjectivity, relationships that would produce truth, yet that could be articulated in a single coherent account with respect to a “mode of production,” thereby avoiding relativism.

We have several axes along which to compare Althusser and Bakhtin: the philosophy of history, the doctrine of totality or fragmentation; the theory of ideology; politics versus ethics; and the notion that relates them all: subject-formation, whether conceived of as interpellation or recognition. The only escape from the otherwise flat contradictions between Althusser and Bakhtin, despite the protests of each, is the Hegelian dialectic. Neither static Althusserian totality nor dynamic Bakhtinian fragmentation is the final truth: there is no final truth, just a sequence of contradictions and sublations—and this logic applies not only to the matter of totality but to ideology versus truth and to politics versus ethics. The three-term sequence of the dialectic—the terms of a contradiction reconciled at a higher level—is the methodological principle that defines a radical dialectic and makes possible a literary criticism that brings together elements internal to a text, intertextual relationships, and generic relationships in a coherent narrative and argument that comprehend both the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom.
According Alexandre Kojève’s *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, recognition is the central concept of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. I will work from this axiom that recognition is the essential movement of the dialectic, because the notion of recognition brings together totality and fragmentation, falsehood and truth, politics and ethics, determinism and freedom, History and history. In each of these cases, recognition is the moment of sublation or the preservation of a contradiction even as it is being cancelled and transformed at a higher level. The key opposition, however—the opposition that constitutes the concept of recognition itself—is that between ideology and truth. Althusser seems to acknowledge, like Hegel, that recognition can only be approached via the negative way of misrecognition and illusion, yet he arrests this approach in its negative moment and thereby ascribes stasis and inevitability to ideology. Recognition is the notion of truth as the overcoming of opposition. As Bakhtin would insist, this overcoming preserves the preceding contradiction or difference within itself, and a new contradiction arises that can only be held in the mind as solidarity among subjects. If the key term of a Marxist dialectical criticism is uniform ideology, a totalizing falsehood; and if the key term of Bakhtinian criticism is intersubjective ideology, a fragmented relativism about truth; the key term of a radical dialectical criticism will be recognition, a truth that emerges out of misrecognition or ideology; a truth that is solidarity on the threshold of synthesis.

A “dialectical criticism” that attempts to cram together Althusser and Bakhtin and Hegel would only be an incoherent mess. I want now to suggest in the abstract a synthesis that depends on selection of the useful and rejection of the useless or harmful in each of these theories. I have already suggested how this synthesis or solidarity might be possible with respect to the related notions of ideology, truth, and subject formation. From Althusser I take a doctrine of materialism that is consistent with the proposition that infrastructures, and literature and criticism in
particular, stand in an overdetermined relationship to other elements of society. They can have positive effects, the most important of which is the articulation of theories viable for successful praxis. Therefore they themselves can be considered a radical practice to be articulated with others. I will return to this point throughout the essay and in conclusion. From Bakhtin I take the importance of the individual, autonomous, and independent voice, expressed in the various utterances, styles, genres, and characters of literature. Also, I take from him the emphasis on dialogue, which maintains the integrity of interlocutors, dialogue partners, interpenetrating or mixed styles or genres. Bakhtin’s dialogism is a principle of liberalism, but it is also a principle of radical resistance to authoritarianism of all forms, intellectual or political; thus Bakhtin is a check to the potentially totalitarian tendency of the dialectic. Finally, I take from Bakhtin the notion, in contrast to Althusser and his allusion to “modalities” of materiality, that the word is non-material; that indeed this freedom from materiality makes the textuality of dialogue a utopian realm of freedom. Only Hegel can join together the tendencies of Bakhtin’s “idealism” and Althusser’s “materialism.” For Hegel, the social is the spiritual transcendence—but thereby also the preservation—of the material. Althusser makes the radical dialectic political; Bakhtin makes it ethical; Hegel makes them cohere. In fact, Hegel is mainly a principle of coherence here: but this coherence, as I will show, is essentially ethical, since the dialectic and recognition are identical. Dialogue must temper dialectic, refusing final reconciliation and thus preserving democratic politics and the acknowledgement of otherness. My theory is not a matter of fidelity to Althusser or Bakhtin or Hegel. It is a synthesis of dialogue and dialectic, ethics and politics, the utopian and the scientific. Thus I will draw on these three throughout the study but will be bound only by the demand for coherence rather than the pious imperative to follow this or that thinker. Ultimately, the study in both form and content is Hegelian. Its form, though construed in
radical terms as solidarity, is essentially dialectical. Its content, though it takes into account the scientific ideology critique of interpellation (Althusser), and the utopian ideology affirmation of dialogue (Bakhtin), is essentially recognition. Yet my hypothesis in adopting a dialectical method is that the logic of Hegel’s form and content (or recognition, since recognition is the identity of form and content in Hegel) supersedes even itself. Recognition must become something else. Yet the Hegelian dialectic cannot so neatly be extricated from its imperialist, racist, and totalitarian histories. I need to justify more explicitly my use of this philosopher.

4. Justifying Hegel

Hegel is not a fashionable philosopher. This or that “theory” may be assumed in an insouciant way as a useful “tool,” but Hegel seems to bring metaphysical, and dangerously metaphysical, baggage with him. What, then, could justify using Hegel in this study?

In an important sense, Hegel is only a tool. My hypothesis is twofold: the contemporary Marxist appropriation of “utopia” is either empty or incoherent, and a synthesis of the two major traditions of socialism, utopian and scientific, can restore the content and consistency to socialism. But the only logic that is capable of this sort of synthesis is Hegelian. Thus Hegel is a tool in the sense that his logic is wielded for a pragmatic end, not to set up a certain kind of metaphysics, a commitment to a philosophy of history wedded to Spirit, totality, or teleology. If my use of Hegel can only be justified by its consequences, however, I cannot hope to justify it in the introduction. My audience or interlocutors must have enough faith to continue reading and see whether the argument is pragmatically worth anything.

This pragmatic use of Hegel, however, would be naïve if it did not acknowledge the inevitable taint of history in the use of Hegel, or to pretend that Hegel would agree with my “interpretation” of him. I concede—indeed I hope—that my use of Hegel is a “misreading,” in
the sense that it can reject the virulently imperialist and racist aspects of Hegel. It is very well to say that one rejects the fascist and totalitarian uses of Hegel. It is good to subject Hegel to the rigor of a Levinasian critique and see if there is anything salvageable. But there is a certain optimism to this logic that mirrors Hegel’s own valorization, in the introduction to his *Philosophy of History*, of human history in the face of atrocity: ultimately the evil of history is justified when understood in terms of some greater good. Similarly, the use of Hegel is justified, so goes the theodicy, if, despite the evil uses of Hegel, some greater, wiser good can come out of it.

To point to Marxism as a prototype of an ethically justified appropriation of Hegel is equally a mistake. My proleptic apology for using Hegel will be bound up with a similar apology for using Marx, but here I want to admit that it does not absolve one to insist that the history of all hitherto appropriations of Marxism has been a series of misappropriations. The atrocities of the twentieth-century were all plausible interpretations of Marx, in part, I will argue, not because they were “utopian” but because they were insufficiently utopian, because Marx left the future open to the freedom of the “Terror” that Hegel himself decried, rather than stipulate some ethical parameters to the instantiation of a good society. If using Hegel does not absolve one from a certain affirmation of a thinker who justified atrocity, neither does using Marx.

Perhaps a better analogy to apologize for the use of Hegel is the appropriation of the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth in a way that challenges rather than legitimizes the anti-Semitism, unjust war, political repression, and fascist collaboration (the list goes on and on) of Christian history. This analogy seems plausible in light of liberation theology, for example. But it is disanalogous, since such a new appropriation of Jesus’s teachings is premised on historical Jesus research that uncovers a historical figure who is of course Jewish (and indeed situated within
Judaism), pacifist, and dead-set against the imperial hegemony of his day. While the historical Hegel was an apologist for imperial domination, the historical Jesus was its critic.

The most honest apology I can make is that in using “dialectical thinking” inspired by Hegel I am trying to take a certain logic out of the hands of a predecessor of fascism and totalitarianism in order to claim this logic for what I take to be some good rather than evil. Part of what makes this approach possible is that Hegel does not, and never did, own the dialectical method. As Charles Taylor observes, such a logic goes back at least to Plato (Taylor 59). And Hegel himself acknowledges the Platonic origins of his logic. “Dialectic,” writes Hegel in his *Logic*, “is no novelty in philosophy….In [Socrates’s] conversations he used to simulate the wish for some clearer knowledge about the subject under discussion, and after putting all sorts of questions with that intent, he drew on those with whom he conversed to the opposite of what their first impressions had pronounced correct” (Hegel *Essential* 96-97). This Socratic negation of inadequate propositions is the first moment—and arguably the most common moment—of Hegelian dialectic, since, to repeat a quotation from the preface to the *Phenomenology*, “Spirit…is just this movement of becoming an *other to itself*, and of suspending this otherness” (21, emphasis original). Accepting a misreading of Hegel is also a way of rejecting the fantasy that one can devise any kind of historically innocent system of thought. Moreover, this approach is a way of exploiting an incoherence in Hegel that Theodor Adorno pinpoints:

If Hegel’s whole exists at all it is only as the quintessence of the partial moments, which always point beyond themselves and are generated from one another; it does not exist as something beyond them. This is what his category of totality is intended to convey. It is incompatible with any kind of tendency to harmony, no matter how much the late Hegel may subjectively have had such tendencies. His
critical thought goes beyond both the stating of the unconnected and the principle of continuity; in him, connection is not a matter of unbroken transition but a matter of sudden change, and the process takes place not through the moments approaching one another but through rupture. (*Hegel 4-5*)

The incoherence is actually a dialectical tension that aspires towards totality while finally denying it. The pernicious reading of “the True is the whole,” which finds the same reconciliation at the end of history that motivates Hegel’s theodicy in the introduction to the *Philosophy of History*—the totality that justifies the evils of the process of history—this reading does not acknowledge that the whole is itself fragmented and cannot therefore be redeemed in such a way that genocides and unjust wars might be justified in accordance with Hegel’s philosophy of history.

Adorno identifies yet another inconsistency in Hegel’s philosophy, an ambiguity between the negative power of the dialectic and the static hegemony of the state. “Hegel’s philosophy of the state,” Adorno observes, “is a necessary tour de force; a tour de force because it suspends the dialectic under the aegis of a principle to which Hegel’s own critique of the abstract could be applied, a principle whose locus, as Hegel at least suggests, is by no means outside the play of social forces…. ” (29). The state can only be affirmed through an inconsistency in the dialectic, an exception to the dialectic’s negative force. Dialectic in fact necessarily erodes hegemony, any hegemony. The central contradiction that Adorno elicits seems to be a utopian element that calls into question the apparent complacency of the attitude toward a society reconciled with itself, beyond conflict. The very assertion of the rationality of the real, Adorno reasons, presupposes an imperative that an unjust society cannot fulfill (30). The ideal of “reconciliation under duress”
(the contradiction Adorno ascribed to Georg Lukács) meant to justify Stalinism in fact undermines it (Adorno “Reconciliation”).

Adorno, then, is taking a utopian stance on Hegel. Hegel’s insistence on a just society, his strain to justify his own time in the name of the Absolute, carries a radical utopian charge that transcends his conservatism. One need not, however, take Hegel as holding that the Absolute and the state are identical. Conflict remains, for instance, in the continued presence of what he calls the “rabble.”\footnote{I take the point that the rabble is the least adequately treated element of Hegel’s Elements of the Philosophy of Right from Harry Dahms (in discussion).} The rabble is a contradictory element in the “real” that elsewhere Hegel claims to be “rational.”

Hegel describes the predicament of the rabble as follows.

> When a large mass of people sinks below the level of a certain standard of living—which automatically regulates itself at the level necessary for a member of the society in question—that feeling of right, integrity, and honour which comes from supporting oneself by one’s own activity and work is lost. This leads to the creation of a rabble, which in turn makes it much easier for disproportionate wealth to be concentrated in a few hands. (266, emphasis original)

The rabble is the sign of a vicious circle of economic injustice, and, according to Hegel, there are two options to ameliorate its condition: provision of jobs or charity. The former is out of the question, because full employment, so Hegel argues, would result in overproduction, which, by an imbalance of production and consumption, would lead to further immiseration. But
charity has equally unfortunate consequences, too, because, while maintaining a “normal standard of living” for the poor as a whole, it destroys the virtues of individuals, “the feeling of self-sufficiency and honour” (267). Hegel arrives at a contradiction: “despite an excess of wealth, civil society is not wealthy enough—i.e. its own distinct resources are not sufficient—to prevent an excess of poverty and the formation of a rabble” (267, emphasis original).

The rabble, as I shall argue in chapter three, is a perversely utopian element in Hegel and Marx, not in the sense of the perfect society but in the sense of calling into question the quest for perfection. This questioning happens in the name of a truly classless society. The rabble and its utopianism pose a threat to capitalism and socialism alike, providing a picture of a true classless society of liberty, equality, and solidarity (comprehended under the single principle of love). This inconsistency of the rabble is not an element that debunks Hegel; rather it confirms its robustness, for the dialectic is driven by inconsistency. At the same time, this inconsistency is not “progressive” or teleological in the ordinary sense. To be sure, the inconsistency is an exigency for an ever-greater inclusion of humankind within the body politic. Such an inclusion, as Hegel demonstrates, is not to be found within the institutions of modern capitalist society—at least in the stage of that society in which Hegel was writing. This inclusion is not progressive in the sense that it contributes to the forward movement of society but rather a break with any forward movement. At the same time, it is progressive in its approach towards an ideal of universality: and the sine qua non of Hegel’s system is not closure but the faltering steps, the incomplete dialectic, towards universality. Therefore, I see the use of Hegel justified for two reasons: dialectic undermines Hegel’s own politics, and dialectic never belonged to Hegel anyway.
But there is a third, more compelling reason for using Hegel. If the inconsistency about the rabble turns an accusation against Hegel into a justification of Hegel, so the apparently inconsistent streams of utopianism and Marxism that flow out of the Hegelian source are a pragmatic or consequentialist justification of Hegel in their convergence. If appreciating the entirety of the tradition of socialism is a worthwhile end, and if, further, Hegel is the only thinker who can reconcile utopia and Marxist socialism into a single vision, then in this sense I may be justified in adopting Hegel as a logic for this study. I have already met and answered some objections against Hegel, and here I provide positive reasons for embracing Hegel. Finally my use of Hegel will be justified by the consequences: if my thesis is worthwhile and rationally justified, then it should be emancipated from its association with the historical figure of Hegel. And my thesis is that indeed the socialist tradition, which is not only the critique of capitalism and the affirmation of a better world, but, just as crucially, the mutual critique and uneasy synthesis of the utopian and scientific approaches to socialism, is worth preserving. I will demonstrate this thesis through a detailed analysis of the genre of the radical novel, first broken into its component subgenres of the utopian novel and the proletarian novel and finally joined in an articulated whole (a whole marked by “solidarity” not “identity,” or a contingent common end rather than a teleological purpose). A radical (scientific and utopian) dialectic, following Hegel, would preserve both the critical and affirmative elements in criticism. Via the utopian dialectic of the radical novel, one can conceive of socialism as a single political formation. One can see it as an enduring response to history, a recurring series of breaks with history.

V. Alternative Hermeneutics: Contemporary Critical Conversation

The first hermeneutic is Franco Moretti’s avowedly scientific-Marxist “distant reading” in *Graphs, Maps, Trees*. The second is anti-Marxist: “surface reading” or “close-but-not-deep”
reading. And the last conceives itself to be a negation of every hermeneutic hitherto offered: “alien phenomenology” as representative of the cluster of theories lumped together under the heading “speculative realism” and “object-oriented ontology.” I take the program of surface reading to be a corrective attempt to return to a kind of reading that would have a practical ethical impact. But I judge both surface reading and object-oriented ontology to be responses to the failure of the hermeneutical program of the eleventh thesis: the attempt to change the world in part through the act of interpreting it.

A. Distant Reading

Some new theories of literary criticism, however ideologically dissimilar, seem linked by that recurrent aspiration in literary theory to be “scientific.” Franco Moretti approaches his texts in a “scientific spirit” inspired by “the natural and the social sciences” (2). Moretti makes an assumption that he will share with the surface readers to be discussed presently: that there is a way of thinking called “science” that “explains” rather than “interprets” and that concerns surface rather than depth. Explanation and surface are characteristic of a new kind of rigor in literary studies. Moretti’s characterization of the opposite of his approach is less than rigorous, especially given his proposal for a movement beyond the study of national literatures. Distant reading opposes science to “French and German metaphysics” (2). The thesis of distant reading is that a quantitative assessment of the patterns of literary production across time will yield “a specific form of knowledge” (1, emphasis original). *Graphs Maps Trees* is peppered with graphs, maps, and trees that explain this superficial form of knowledge, but the book fails to interpret this knowledge, much less to talk about its implications for further theoretical investigation, literary criticism, or ethical or political praxis. Moretti stipulates that “quantitative research” of the type that he is doing “provides data, not interpretation” (9, emphasis original). He confesses
that “Quantitative data can tell us when Britain produced one new novel per month, or week, or
day, or hour for that matter, but where the significant turning points lie along the continuum—
and why—is something that must be decided on a different basis” (9). In Moretti’s analysis—
sexy because slim, but therefore unsatisfying—much depends on unexamined oppositions like
“data” and “interpretation” or “explanation” and “interpretation.” *Graphs* does not countenance
the fact that a judgment about “significant turning points” is already built into the project of
measuring production according to month or week or day or hour; neither—surprisingly enough
for a theory that commends itself as a theory of genre—does the study trouble itself about how
the very quantity of a “novel” is laden with interpretive, qualitative judgments (what counts as a
novel, and why? And does one look at a book and “explain” what sort of thing it is, or does one
not have to “interpret” it as well?). I take “interpretation,” here and in my discussion below, to be
a survey of the range of possible meanings of an object (text, genre, person, etc.), which may be
more or less ambiguous or obscure; a judgment of the correctness of one or more of those
meanings, a judgment grounded on reasons potentially acceptable to one’s interlocutors; and an
elaboration of that judgment through attending to the particular details of the object. Modestly,
Moretti does not offer his project of distant reading as an exclusive and comprehensive program
for literary studies. “I no longer believe,” he concludes, “that a single explanatory framework
may account for the many levels of literary production and their multiple links with the larger
social system” (92). This predicament allows for what he calls “a certain conceptual
eclecticism.” Moretti nonetheless evades articulating his explanatory framework with any closer
attention to texts, particularly individual texts, yet it seems as though he has given up on such
hermeneutics that his fellow socialists Eagleton and Jameson still employ. For Moretti, science
encounters an object prior to any mediations of perception, cognition, or theory. If rival theories
of interpretation—or attempts to overcome the impulse to interpretation—are any indication, this impulse to unmediated empiricism is a response to a failure to change the world: at least one can try to understand it.

B. Surface reading

1. Best and Marcus

Though it rejects Moretti’s muted socialism, “surface reading” might be a happy small-scale match for distant reading. In their programmatic essay “Surface Reading: An Introduction”—published as an introduction to a 2009 Representations issue on “The Way We Read Now”—Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus reject what they call “symptomatic reading” in favor of “surface reading.” “Symptomatic reading” is an umbrella term to cover all varieties of interpretation—from psychoanalysis to Marxism to “hermeneutics of suspicion” (2)—that posit a meaning to a text that is “hidden, repressed, deep, and in need of detection and disclosure by an interpreter” (2). Although Best and Marcus insist that symptomatic reading is a, if not the, dominant contemporary form of reading, their attack is directed primarily against Fredric Jameson’s The Political Unconscious of 1981. Certainly Jameson’s text is the most influential example of Marxist symptomatic reading in the U.S., but The Political Unconscious does not quite fit the Procrustean bed of symptomatic reading that Best and Marcus construct. Jameson is far from celebrating the “heroic critic.” Jameson criticizes the idea, for instance, that literary criticism even be regarded as “labor.” Further, Jameson rejects the idea that criticism counts as praxis. In fact, his book closes on the very cusp of praxis, which is finally “what Marxism is all about.” The entire theory of reading is a propaedeutic to praxis, if that. It would be more charitable to test Jameson’s “depth” hermeneutics with reference to his Postmodernism, in which he engages with a depthless historical moment. It’s important that The Political Unconscious is a
hermeneutic of the nineteenth century and Postmodernism a hermeneutic of the twentieth.

Always historicize!

It is also important that Best and Marcus miss the mark here when they mark Jameson as paradigmatic symptomatic reader. No one describes him- or herself as a “symptomatic reader”; the latter is a straw person. However, one might concede that there are beings out there like the archetypal symptomatic critic and preserve the rational kernel (to risk one of those old depth metaphors!) of Best and Marcus’s complaint. “Critique” of one form or another seems somehow connected with “liberation,” and no liberation of the relevant varieties, according to Best and Marcus, have been forthcoming. If for Best and Marcus Jameson is the heroic avatar of Marx, they make a rather similar claim to patrimony:

We find ourselves the heirs to Michel Foucault, skeptical about the very possibility of a radical freedom and dubious that literature or its criticism can explain our oppression or provide the keys to our liberation. Where it had become common for literary scholars to equate their work with political activism, the disasters and triumphs of the last decade have shown that literary criticism alone is not sufficient to effect change. (2)

There are several claims here that need to be parsed before the criticism can be fully appreciated. Symptomatic readers apparently believe that there is something called “radical freedom”; that criticism can explain oppression; that it can provide keys to liberation; that their work is equivalent to activism; and that that activism taken in isolation from other forms of activism is politically efficacious. Indeed, one does not need to invoke the authority of Foucault to doubt this string of grand propositions! Whatever radical freedom may be—the term smacks unfashionably of Sartre, but does no more than smack—it is a singularly odd suspicion (one that
must be operating at some deep level) that a Lacanian or a neo-Marxist would believe in it. The very mention of a word like “liberation” is enough to elicit automatic derision for anyone engaged in “ideology critique” or the others who go around probing symptoms. And any theorist who has ever heard of the difference between base and superstructure will join in unison with Foucault, and Best and Marcus, in doubting that literary criticism has much of a chance in a solo raid on the forces of oppression.

What, then, is left of Best and Marcus’s criticism? There remains the reasonable complaint that criticism has not delivered on its promise (implied in The Political Unconscious) to articulate its work with an efficacious political praxis. Criticism has to be fruitfully related to praxis, if it is not to be an unhappy and pointless exercise of ingenuity. It is essential, then, to make explicit the relationship between a self-consciously radical theory and criticism and a theory of praxis. Indeed, if we take the definition of praxis as “applied theory,” a radical hermeneutic demands some correlative “material” practices. (Here I can’t give an abstract definition of what “material” means, it being an essentially contested term that all parties in the dispute like to claim for themselves, but I can give some uncontroversial but non-trivial examples: organizing, demonstrations, electoral politics, lobbying, pedagogy. These may be contrasted with strictly textual practices such as writing novels or criticism.) My point for the moment is twofold: that no one, least of all Marxists (with some kind of commitment to determination by a material base), hold that theory and criticism taken in isolation from material practices have any political efficacy; and that everyone, especially Marxists but not only them, ought to seek ways of articulating their theory and criticism with material efforts to establish resist hegemony and establish a new hegemony.
After their critique of Jameson as paradigmatic of the symptomatic readers, Best and Marcus outline a positive agenda for surface reading, which is structured around a definition of terms. What, then, do they mean by the metaphors of “surface” and “depth”? Best and Marcus, in an attempt to synthesize the shared projects of the contributors to the Representations issue, stipulate that “we take surface to mean what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts; what is neither hidden nor hiding; what, in the geometrical sense, has length and breadth but no thickness, and therefore covers no depth. A surface is what insists on being looked at rather than what we must train ourselves to see through” (9, emphasis original). Surface is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts. It is left unclear here to whom surface is evident etc. If everyone, then it is hard to see what a critic’s special job is. This is not only a pragmatic and professional worry but a doubt about the coherence of a theory that claims to offer a critical program. If, on the other hand, surface is only accessible to a critical few, then it is hard to avoid the implication that surfaces are sometimes a little obscure. In either case, what is most disturbing, however—and everyone should be disturbed by this—is the implication of self-evidence. A surface just shows itself. The appeal to a surface undermines the possibility of debate. One has a handle on what the text is in itself, and what it is in itself is how it appears to one. Self-evidence is a dangerous claim—rather, it is often not a statement but an attempt to preempt debate. In fact, Best and Marcus claim, we do not even need to be hampered by “ideology.” They insist that the point of surface reading is to proceed objectively, in an ideologically neutral manner: “we would suggest that to begin to challenge the state of things, or the distortions of ideology, we must strive to produce undistorted, complete descriptions of them” (18). Along the same lines, but more scarily, Best and Marcus assert that texts have their interpretations, “their own truths” already built in, as it were; they “mediate themselves; what we
think theory brings to texts (form, structure, meaning) is already present in them” (11). This account of a text would license a gesture of self-evidence: to say the text mediates itself is equivalent to saying that it is immediate, which in turn seems to equate what is obvious with what is. Best and Marcus deny this last turn, though, claiming that surface is “the intricate structure of literary language” (10, emphasis original). The substitution of the adjective “intricate” for a metaphor of depth is supposed to extricate Best and Marcus from the fruitless labors of the symptomatic readers, but the distinction between intricacy and hiddenness, or “density” and “complexity” on the one hand and “latency” on the other is a very fine one: conceptually distinct, perhaps, but practically not. Imagine a debate between two critics on whether Toni Morrison means to ironize the slave catcher’s voice in Beloved or if she intends to portray that voice objectively in all of its horror. The first reader treats the text as ironic, urging that Morrison insists on the reader doubting the veracity of the slave catcher. The second reader observes that the slave catcher plainly speaks too coolly and rationally for Morrison to be insisting on irony. But the second, surface reader has no monopoly on the appeal to self-evidence and perceptibility. The first, symptomatic reader might return that irony is just as evident and perceptible as “straight” language in this case. The debate must be resolved at non-obvious levels, and it is unfair at this point for the straight reader to claim that the ironic reader seeks non-obvious but deep meanings while the straight reader seeks non-obvious but surface meanings. The metaphorical opposition has lost its purchase on the situation and “depth” becomes itself not a description of what is evident about the critical debate but a term of abuse.

2. Love

The surface readers expect their rhetorical oppositions to perform a good deal of critical work. The example of the controversy over Beloved comes from surface reader Heather Love’s essay
“Close but Not Deep.” Like Moretti’s attempt to banish “interpretation” for “explanation,” Love wants to eschew the troublesome arcana of “interpretation” in favor of mere “description.” She does not provide a rigorous distinction between these two terms, but she does provide sets of alternative metaphors. In a way similar to Best and Marcus, Love opposes depth, richness, and warmth, and endorses surface, complexity, and coolness. The label Love gives the former set of metaphors is “humanism”; the latter set has no label, presumably because description just is what it is: it needs no special term. Love anticipates the objection that description may, like interpretation, be “rich,” but maintains the distinction between description and interpretation nonetheless: “Good descriptions are in a sense rich, but not because they truck with imponderables like human experience or human nature. They are close, but they are not deep; rather than adding anything ‘extra’ to the description, they account for the real variety that is already there” (377). She provides no example of what would count as “extra,” and it is doubtful that appealing to such a word would solve anything in a dispute between the interpreter and the describer, nor how restriction to what’s already there could amount to anything more than paraphrase, tautology, or trivia. It is significant, though, that Love considers “networks” already there, intrinsic to the text. Though this is a term that Love does not elucidate, it seems to be an important example of what occupies some hazy space between what’s trivia and what’s extra. “Literature offers accounts of the world,” submits Love, “that are faithful, detailed, and complex, and that trace networks” (377).

“Faithful” and “networks” are the only interesting terms in this claim. What can faithfulness mean here? It cannot mean a relationship of correspondence, because we are talking about the relationship between fiction and social reality. “Trace networks,” however, may provide the key to what counts as “faithful,” for it is possible that fiction corresponds to
networks when it does not, as the correspondence theory holds, trace relationships between propositions and facts. It is *prima facie* plausible to claim fidelity and network-tracing for social science, but what that could mean in the case of analysis of fiction is unclear. Dickens traces the complex networks of Chancery Court in *Bleak House*, and hence displays a kind of faithfulness to objective reality that perhaps penetrates the hermeneutic fog with which the book begins, but it is harder to see how Kafka’s tracing of networks in *The Trial* can be called faithful in any but an honorific sense, unless one takes the (dismaying deeply!) humanist or existentialist interpretation that Kafka is faithful to his portrayal of a human condition or modern predicament or psychoanalytic situation. Whatever the case, there is no evident surface on either of the novels, either the Dickensian one or the Kafkaesque one. A crucial point to which I want to return is the question of theory-ladenness in reading. One wonders whether comprehension of these networks—the “law” in Dickens or Kafka—is theory-laden or not. By theory-ladenness I mean the necessity of non-empirical presuppositions conditioning empirical description. If description is theory-laden, then it is not straightforward description but involve interpretation in some sense: it involves, for instance, some theory of modern bureaucracy or “the absurd” or such concepts. If description is not theory laden—if one can describe *The Trial* without resort to interpretive concepts (“Joseph K. is accused of some unknown thing that he did not do….”) then Love seems implicated in the very “naïve empiricism” that she says she rejects (377). I take naïve empiricism to mean the theory that one can observe reality independently of theoretical mediation. But Love quotes Bruno Latour approvingly when the latter claims the ability, on the basis of unmediated empirical observation, to say “what the real world is really like” (Latour qtd. in Love 377, emphasis original). In fact, however, Love concedes that interpretation is inescapable: “It is of course impossible to account for behavior without any projection of a ‘rear
world’ of intentions, structures, or values. There is no such thing as a ‘pure’ description, since every description entails an interpretation of some kind” (380). But she offers no reasons why this concession is not devastating to her proposal for a “descriptive turn.” She moves on to beg the question in her insistence that she is concerned with the description of “mere behavior” (380).

The admission that criticism is a non-obvious and even arcane task seems unavoidable, so that Best and Marcus’s recommendation that we adopt “literal readings that take texts at face value” rings hollow (12). It is a serious problem that there is no single self-evident and literal reading to a text. It is not the case that we are all aware of a single obvious literal meaning of The Trial surrounded by a welter of interpretations (e.g., it is not clear that Joseph K. is not guilty; it is not even clear that what he did is unknown); practically, we are simply faced with the welter of interpretations.

C. Interpreting the World and Changing It

I have spent several pages with the surface readers for a number of reasons. In spite of themselves, they demonstrate the necessity of “interpretation” or “depth” or “symptomatic” readings. They demonstrate the paucity of a few attempts to move beyond interpretation. They show that practically the wielding of a word like surface is no guard against obscurity and ambiguity. But if the surface readers have a positive point to make, it is that critics ought to be ethically and politically engaged. Symptomatic readers have not delivered on their hopes to go beyond interpretation and change the world.

This commitment to value, however, is somewhat compromised by the commitment to the divorce between empirical reality and value to which Best, Marcus, and Love apparently subscribe. And the ethical challenge, as Best and Marcus acknowledge, cuts both ways. If the
radical symptomatic readers are practically inconsequential, the surface readers are perhaps quietist. “Can surface reading be anything other than a tacit endorsement of the status quo…?” Best and Marcus ask (13). They respond to the question by denying that aesthetic “freedom” (which here seems to mean the “autonomy” of the text in its “liberatory potential” and “the valiant labor of the critic”) is possible or even desirable (13). Marcus and Best advocate a different kind of freedom, however, a freedom found in “attentiveness to the artwork” and “all the potentials made available by texts” (16). Among these potentials seems to be the ability to speak truth. If they have rejected the value-ladenness and asserted the objectivity of their reading activity, Best and Marcus seem concerned with presenting the truth (though they don’t make clear how this big ambiguous word should be understood). And the horizon of Best and Marcus’s introduction to surface reading seems to be an ideological objectivity as a precondition to “challeng[ing] the state of things” (18).

This is an admirable purpose to criticism and could serve as a premise for the articulation of criticism with other practices that would, in the manner of Laclau and Mouffe, strive towards a new hegemony. It may be misguided to co-opt Best and Marcus for a socialist criticism, when socialists come in for their harshest (though flimsiest) criticism. There is a fundamental difference between an empiricist and a dialectical approach to criticism, and to the apprehension of the world. While the empiricist ethical stance is a two-stage process of understanding the world then changing it, the dialectician, following Marx’s eleventh thesis and being faithful to a certain reading of Hegel as well, contends that an interpretation of the world is a way of changing it. Surface readers perceive this in the dialectical tradition—indeed, they hold dialectical readers accountable for this claim to the inextricability of interpreting and changing the object of interpretation that has been disavowed by latter-day Marxists.
For most Marxists, interpretation is a theory-laden (indeed ideology-laden) operation, and in this sense it changes the object as it is “in itself.” But this change is no longer always interpreted as a revolutionary (or even progressive) kind of change—the object may remain quiescent. I hold that interpretation may condition the object in a certain way, preparing it, as it were, for radical transformation; it is a necessary but not sufficient condition for that transformation. So my difference from Best and Marcus here is that the object is always-already changed by interpretation; I do not deny their implication that criticism is not, by itself, efficacious praxis. It does not win a struggle for publically funded healthcare or tuition-free higher education—though it very well might contribute to it, if it incites scholars and students to action.

D. Alien Phenomenology

But some surface readers, disappointed by the recalcitrance of the object, abandon hope in the attempt to transform the object and capitulate to the object in despair. They do not want to become “naïve empiricists,” but they want to recover a tradition that antedates not only Hegel but also Kant. Thus the new phenomenon of “object-oriented ontology,” which turns despair over the object into a celebration of it. From this vantage point of disappointment with dialectical hermeneutics, one can see why a resolutely anti-interpretive model of ontology should fascinate contemporary critics. This turn to “objects,” where objects are understood as “material” things “existing independently of human beings” is not the result of argument, as the Kantian and Hegelian revolutions were, but the result of a disappointment over revolutionary hope. In conclusion to my survey of a few anti-dialectical theories of criticism, I want to argue that (a) object-oriented ontology is a flaccid replacement to dialectical thought and reaffirm that (b) dialectical thought is not exhausted. My way of supporting (b), which is the burden of this
dissertation, is through reintegrating the utopian and Marxist strands of the Hegelian tradition.

My way of arguing for (a) is as follows:

In *Alien Phenomenology, or What It’s Like to Be a Thing*, Ian Bogost joins the surface readers in their rejection of “humanism,” especially its corollaries “anthropocentrism” and “correlationism.” Anthropocentrism Bogost thinks is the main problem with humanism: the definition of the world, and the constituents of the world, strictly in relation to human subjectivity. Correlationism is the doctrine that “being exists only as a correlate between mind and world” (4). Correlationists subscribe to an exclusive view of “human access,” the view that humans “sit at the center of being, organizing and regulating it like an ontological watchmaker” (5). This complex metaphor of anthropocentrism involves a number of ideas. “Center of being” is a strange phrase, but connotes the “centered subject” that Descartes is often alleged to have created. Many since Descartes—Marx, Nietzsche, Freud (and one should not forget Kant)—have decentered the subject in various ways. Somehow humans have not been sufficiently banished from the center. At any rate, wherever they are situated, they are in charge of ascribing coherence to the world in a quasi-divine way. “Ontological watchmaker” is a cryptic figure, but it conjures images of the god of deism. This does not quite work, because Bogost suggests humans are quite active in their accessing of the world. His figurative language does not reward close reading, but “correlationism”—just because it is a rechristening of the old idea of “adequation”—is clear enough.

The alternative Bogost offers is *alien phenomenology*, an attempt at an absolute rejection of humanism and its corollaries. Together with this rejection, Bogost endorses the view that “items” (the word “objects” implies human subjects) are isolated, exist as singularities that are of equal value, and that derive their value from their intrinsic properties. Items, whether engines,
tofu, or human beings (to use Bogost’s favorite examples), have their own experiences of “what it’s like” to be them, and they have their own worlds of value. Bogost seems to convict everyone but himself of humanism. Only a philosophy of “items” decisively rejects correlationism. But he identifies the founding father of this tradition in Kant. As a critique of correlationism, Bogost pokes fun at Kant’s unsociable personality, suggesting this personal flaw is indicative of “the blinkered state of philosophy as access” (5). If there is an argument here, however, it seems to be that correlationism and human access are in their anthropocentrism too self-centered and narrow to account for all of “being.”

Bogost is significantly silent about epistemology, perhaps because all of epistemology has hitherto depended on some view of a knowing human subject. But epistemology is a crucial gap in his argument: in his book there is no argument against humanism and no argument in favor of alien phenomenology. He assumes that humanism is bad because it does not do justice to the richness of being; he assumes his own position is good because it does justice to being. Yet the very thing in question is the nature of being; one cannot simply assume its richness without begging the question. In view of the fact that Bogost should shoulder the burden of proof for his own speculations, and in view of the fact that he gives no more than an ad hominem argument (if that) against the most influential epistemologist in Western philosophy, it is hardly obligatory or salutary for me to offer a defense of Kant. But I will suggest three reasons why making fun of Kant for his humanism is misguided: (1) Kant stands in need of refutation, not ridicule; (2) Kant gives a persuasive argument for the unknowability of objects in themselves; and (3) Kant is not straightforwardly “humanist.” It is self-evident that Kant deserves argument rather than ridicule. The unknowability of objects as they are in themselves is one of the central theses of The Critique of Pure Reason. My reason for denying Kant’s humanism in any ordinary
sense is that, though Kant’s Copernican Revolution does result in the position of objects conforming to human cognition rather than human cognition conforming to objects, Kant denies that this epistemological position characterizes our relationship to things in themselves. Rather, we are “de-centered” relative to things as they are independently of our knowledge; we can only know how things appear to us as they are conditioned by our cognitive faculties, not how they are in themselves. Kant actually shows the limits of correlationism, for only phenomena, not noumena, depend for their existence on consciousness.

For my purposes, though, the most serious problem with alien phenomenology is the absurdity of trying to sanitize language of its residue of what is human. “Item” is finally no less anthropocentric a term than “object,” since both are instances of human language. Nevermind the necessity of epistemology—diction is unavoidable. Thus, whether or not it is a good thing, correlationism is unavoidable. But this study is committed to the proposition that it can be a good thing. If both depth and human access have in a sense been expelled from Kant’s philosophy, they return with a vengeance in Hegel and Marx. The object, as I noted above, is in the Hegelian/ Marxian tradition always-already conditioned by human knowledge, and the horizon of the dialectic of both Hegel and Marx is a complete appropriation—a negation, preservation, and transformation—of the object. So perhaps Bogost’s speculations are germane to the utopian dialectic that I will argue for in this study. Yet arguably Hegel and Marx do not wholly reverse Kant’s Copernican Revolution; a certain interpretation of the attempted appropriation of the object says that such an appropriation is never complete. Indeed, this is the interpretation that any contemporary employment of Hegel and Marx must adopt, since the strife towards appropriation, or what Adorno calls “reconciliation,” is salutary, while its achievement is pernicious. Because the contemporary fashionable turns towards the object, whether empiricist
(the surface readers) or alien-phenomenologist, turn out to be unconvincing, it is worth seeing what potential, both critical and affirmative, that a Hegelian dialectical hermeneutic, one that synthesizes utopian and Marxist understandings of socialism in an unprecedented way, might have today.

VI. Native Son

My discussion of Althusser, Bakhtin, and Hegel as the elements for a synthesis that would renew dialectical criticism has been abstract thus far. The following reading of Richard Wright’s *Native Son* will illustrate this hermeneutic. First, it will suggest, in its relationship with the romance by Amos Fiske with which I began, the relationship between utopian and proletarian novels with respect to recognition. If the utopian novel is a positive moment, the glimpse of a total and universal reconciliation effected through the relationship of equality, the proletarian novel is a negative moment, the introduction of difference and diremption into the dialectic of genre. In contrast to Hegel’s model, the primary moment of utopian recognition is equality, the most universal of relations, to be succeeded by the fragility of the relationship of love in the proletarian novel. *Native Son*, I contend, shows a Left perfectly content to recognize equality in the abstract but absolutely set against acknowledgement of difference and intersectionality. In this sense, *Native Son*, though vast in its scope—Bigger Thomas as a truly world-historical individual⁵—narrates first of all a failure of love. The exigency of rereading *Native Son* now is at

⁵ See Lukács’s discussion in *The Historical Novel* (39-40), where he quotes Hegel: the world-historical individual is “the hidden Spirit knocking at the door of the present, still subterranean, still without a contemporary existence and wishing to break out, for whom the
a moment when not only the abstract acknowledgement of equality is common in the U.S., but even the outpouring of love in the form of mourning for Michael Brown is succeeded only a fledgling program of praxis in the Black Lives Matter Movement, the solidarity that would transform the structure of U.S. institutions. Thus *Native Son* is not merely a critique of the Old Left but a critique of the contemporary Left as well. If Amos Fiske’s utopia provides an ideal Hegelian vision of recognition, Richard Wright’s proletarian novel *Native Son* provides a terrible vision of tarrying with the negative, an approach toward recognition that refuses the possibility of reconciliation. These two antithetical visions of self and other must be preserved without cancelling out the power of either, without yet affirming a vision of solidarity that is the horizon of utopia. I will reserve this affirmation for the final two chapters.

*Native Son* tells the story of Bigger Thomas, a teenage member of the black lumpenproletariat in the South Side of Chicago. Wright’s *bildungsroman* concerns Bigger’s misrecognition by himself, for this boy misunderstands his own power and potential, primarily his lack of both, and his consequent violence. Just as importantly, *Native Son* concerns Bigger’s misrecognition by others, namely the Communist Jan Erlone and his girlfriend (and daughter of his employer) Mary Dalton, whom Bigger kills inadvertently in a moment of panic. The killing is a paradoxical expression of powerless force from a self-consciousness that has not attained recognition, who encounters the other in the situation of a struggle to the death, in what might be a parody of the struggle for recognition in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*: “the relation of the two self-conscious individuals is such that they prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle” (113-14). The narrative is an approach to recognition that never arrives. For Bigger’s contemporary world is but a husk containing a different kernel from the old” (Hegel qtd. in Lukács 39-40).
Communist lawyer Boris Max, Bigger becomes a synecdoche of all African Americans. But Bigger comes to construe himself as irreducibly particular and insoluble in some greater whole, his crime having constituted the essence of his life in an existentialist sense. Reciprocal recognition—the kind of regime, or movement beyond regime, that Amos Fiske imagines—is both implied (in hope) and denied (in despair) by Bigger’s story.

*Native Son* denies Bigger Thomas’s possibility of “a common level” with others, the egalitarianism or equality of prestige fantasized by Communist Jan and fellow traveler Mary. They attempt to have dinner with Bigger at an “authentic” African-American restaurant and insist that he call them by first name (72). These are fumbling attempts to acknowledge Bigger’s humanity—“Yet they must live like we live,” says Mary. “They’re human. . . .”—but her premise is wrong (they must live like we live), so her conclusion about Bigger’s humanity remains in question. She patronizes rather than recognizes him. And what is at stake is not Bigger’s humanity but his social being. In the struggle to the death—a struggle of which Jan and Mary are ignorant—the persons involved must overcome nature or mortality in order to be recognized as social agents. Glossing the “Lordship and Bondage” section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Alexandre Kojève shows how the self “is ready to risk, ‘to deny,’ his animal life in a fight for the recognition of his human being-for-itself” (Kojève 13). Animal life (what in *The Open* Giorgio Agamben calls “bare life”) is the “humanity” that Mary ascribes to Bigger, but Bigger desires recognition, the being-for-itself or self-consciousness of being in society. This struggle for recognition thus involves the sublation of nature via the fight to the death. Death, writes Hegel, is “the natural negation of consciousness, negation without independence, which thus remains without the required significance of recognition” (*Phenomenology* 114). Hence Bigger fantasizes an act akin to a revolution that repudiates all institutions, even the institution of
nature itself, transcending his own confused egoism for a moment to imagine this ultimate act of staking his life: in fact, attaining being-for-self through the extirpation of his being. Wright holds the Hegelian view that one finds one’s identity or truth in the act: Max declares that the death of Mary “was an act of creation!” (400). Driving Jan and Mary, Bigger “Suddenly he wanted to seize some heavy object in his hand and grip it with all the strength of his body and in some strange way rise up and stand in naked space above the speeding car and with one final blow blot it out—with himself and them in it” (70). Bigger fantasizes a radical act of absolute freedom; he foreshadows the act of staking his life such that only a simultaneous murder and suicide could effect his recognition. Crime is the truth of the “rabble,” the lumpenproletariat, or, as Max puts it, Bigger’s “very existence is a crime against the state!” (400, emphasis original). If Bigger appears to be the one attempting to undermine the state, the state equally works to undermine Bigger. Honneth remarks that for Hegel, the “criminal’s inner motive then consists of the experience of not being recognized, at the established stage of mutual recognition, in a satisfactory way” (Honneth Struggle 20). In his speech to the judge, Boris Max will observe that murder, similar to the American revolution, is a form of “a dream to realize our personalities and to make those realized personalities secure!” (399) Max’s speech is an attempt to make America recognize itself in Bigger, not only to portray the “psychology of the Negro people” (397).

Bakhtin’s dialogue or polyphony pervades Native Son. James A. Miller advises readers to observe the “heterogeneous stylistic unities” in the novel, “to pay close attention to the various speech communities Bigger Thomas encounters on his quest for voice and audience” (120). Miller rightly observes that rhetorical heterogeneity prevents a mutual understanding even between Bigger and Max. But “communities” do not exist in Wright, only vexed relations of intersectionality such as that between Bessie and Bigger. Miller’s reading is a useful corrective
to a Cold War critical tradition that ironized Max’s speech in order to elevate Bigger’s own existentialist affirmations of his essence as a lone convict facing death. To be sure, there is no such thing as a “lonely voice” for Bakhtin—he theorizes carnivalesque rather than egoistic estrangement—but neither is there community—only strife or cacophony.6

Bakhtinian dialogue is most obvious in the argument between defense attorney Max and State’s Attorney Buckley. To be sure, Max aims at a dialectical understanding with the court, beginning with “a mere act of understanding Bigger Thomas” (383). More broadly, the lawyer wants the judge to see Bigger as an instance of a greater phenomenon of racial inequality and “to recognize human life draped in a form and guise alien to ours, but springing from a soil plowed and sown by all our hands” (388). Bigger’s life is a product of the life of the nation as a whole. Yet Max mistakess Bigger for an instance of the whole, whether the whole “Negro psychology” or even the whole of America, insofar as on the Hegelian view the opposite, the dialectical counterpart, is the truth of the self.

Max pleads for a minimal kind of recognition, a prisoner’s number: “To send him to prison would be more than an act of mercy. You would be for the first time conferring life upon him. He would be brought for the first time within the orbit of our civilization. He would have an identity, even though it be but a number. He would have for the first time an openly designated relationship with the world” (404). A number is the reductio ad absurdum of identity. Understanding, recognition, identity fail in the dialogical context of the contest between Max and Buckley. The two lawyers clash on the predicament of African Americans, and of the American

6 I take this expression from Frank O’Connor’s study of the short story The Lonely Voice. The lone individual appears in the novel, but for Bakhtin this lone individual is surrounded by a multitude of other lone individuals.
people generally. “We must deal here,” says Max, “on both sides of the fence, among whites as well as blacks, among workers as well as employers…” (387). The conviction and sentencing to death of Bigger is a casualty, not a closure, to the conflict between these groups. Not even Bigger understands Max (406).

But Bigger and Max perform the most disturbing form of dialogue, because between speech undermines the last hope of solidarity. For Miller, the Communists recognize Bigger as a human being, but not as a particular voice:

In personal terms, Bigger seems to achieve a level of human recognition—of sorts—through his relationships with Jan and Max….But Max…recoils from Bigger’s final speech, and the call which Bigger issues in his assertion “I Am” does not receive responsive testimony from Max. Rather, we are left with the final image of Bigger Thomas facing his impending death in proud and lonely isolation…. (123-25)

The distinction between humanity and voice is crucial. Humanity in Native Son is an abstraction that allows Bigger to be subsumed into a community without voice, an experience of America, the truth of which is the lumpenproletariat. The first conversation with Max moves Bigger, because “in Max’s asking of those questions he had felt a recognition of his life, of his feelings, of his person that he had never encountered before” (360). And indeed, the final conversation is premised on this recognition, “the faith that at bottom all men lived as he lived and felt as he felt” (422). Juxtaposed with Mary’s ideological claim that “they must live like we live”; therefore they’re human,” the feeling that Bigger is at bottom identical with all men is false. He lives on the South Side; the Daltons own the South Side. Thus a misunderstanding more profound because more subtle than that between the judge and Max or between Buckley
and Max obtains between Bigger and Max. The very word that underlies Max’s defense, “look[ing] at the world in a way that shows no whites and no blacks,” elides Bigger himself and prevents a dialectical harmony between advocate and prisoner (424). That “recognition of his life, of his feelings, of his person” dissolves into Bigger’s supposition that those who called for his death are just like him, “th-they was like m-me, trying to g-get something like I was . . . th-that they was t-trying to get something, too”—a hypothesis that Max evades with the resignation, “You’re going to die, Bigger . . . .” (425-26). This evasion undermines the hope, beyond death, of a world without distinction. The descent of Native Son is from a careless alienation, “playing white,” to a nihilistic alienation. Before, Bigger has understood at least the tone of Max’s speech to the courtroom, but now Bigger misunderstand Max’s last speech, a charge to “believe in yourself” (428). Bigger takes up this charge. “What I killed for, I am!” (429). He declares his belief in the meaningfulness, the goodness, of his crime. “I’m all right. I feel all right when I look at it that way . . . .” (429). Max exits in terror.

The conclusion of Native Son—the door clanging shut behind Max—seals Bigger within his own consciousness, a complicated mode of misrecognition or recognition that is limited to the self. This dialogue, which apparently reduces to a single voice, is irreducibly double-voiced, because Max and Bigger are left with irreconcilable voices. They don’t disagree; they don’t understand one another enough for disagreement. They now occupy separate worlds, a “plurality of consciousnesses...each with its own world...” (Bakhtin Problems 6, emphasis original).

Nonetheless, Bakhtin’s dialogue here approaches recognition, an individual development cut off from the three spheres, because it reveals starkly what a person is, irrespective of another’s acknowledgement. Though it cancels all reciprocity, it is a violently egalitarian form of regard, for the killing “made him feel the equal of” white counterparts (check citation, context 164).
As I have shown, for Bakhtin, despite his ultimate harmony with Hegel, Hegelian recognition implies monolithic identity between subjects rather than difference between them. This idea of recognition is implicit in Bakhtin’s characterization of polyphony in Dostoevsky’s novels: “Each novel presents an opposition, which is never canceled out dialectically, of many consciousnesses, and they do not merge in the unity of an evolving spirit . . . .” (Problems 26). Yet Hegelian recognition on Honneth’s account contains and sublates both difference and identity; “Spirit” is just another name for the paradoxical “carnivalesque” in which each novel participates. The carnivalesque is a culminating moment in the development of the dialectic. It is the moment that preserves otherness even in the reconciliation between opposites. This solidarity—not identity—of Bakhtin and Hegel is necessary because Bakhtin on his own is inconsistent; only as a moment in a Hegelian dialectic can he be made consistent, for the dialectic moves by reaching contradiction and negating that contradiction in order to make way for a new reconciliation.

Taking Dostoevsky as both descriptive and prescriptive of the novel form, Bakhtin remarks that “everything in [Crime and Punishment]—the fates of people, their experiences and ideas—is pushed to its boundaries, everything is prepared, as it were, to pass over into its opposite (but not, of course, in the abstractly dialectical sense), everything is taken to the extreme, to its outermost limit” (Problems 167). But the seeds of the dialectic are already sown here. Bakhtin’s strange association of the “carnivalesque” with polyphony suggests a dialectical reconciliation, the union of opposites. “This [carnivalistic] laughter” of the novel “could grasp and comprehend a phenomenon in the process of change and transition” from death to birth, from crowning to decrowning (164). Through this passing over into the opposite, however, Bakhtin maintains the opposition between interlocutors in the dialectic, a continued contradiction.
of the sort Butler attributes to Hegel, suggested by the *Phenomenology*’s definition of Spirit as “just this movement of becoming an *other to itself*, i.e., becoming an *object to itself*, and of suspending this otherness” (21). The course of the *Phenomenology* is this alienation, suspension, and alienation again. Bakhtin admits that the passing over goes so far as a “threshold,” to “unfinalized transition”—where “transition” may be construed as that Hegelian suspension of otherness, the momentary reconciliation with the other (Bakhtin *Problems* 167). But the carnival image strives toward a dialectical reconciliation as it “strives to encompass and unite within itself both poles of becoming or both members of an antithesis”; “Everything in his [Dostoevsky’s] world lives on the very border of its opposite” (176).

Bakhtin makes a political decision in coming to the very threshold of Hegelianism, then backing away. Bakhtin must repudiate Hegel as the original theorist of the catastrophic Stalinist experiment. But there is another version of Hegel that is congenial to Bakhtin’s project, the Hegel for whom the True is not the static monolith of the whole; otherness to self springs continually as as a guard against the dangers of a totalization that would eradicate dissent. But Bakhtin serves as a warning against a certain reading of Hegel. Indeed, if the paradigm of recognition were the “imperialist” or “colonizing” “master” and his corresponding “slave,” recognition would necessarily be a kind of conquest and absorption of otherness. But recognition proper, the recognition that follows the principle of “Members Unlimited,” is solidarity, not identity (Thompson 17-25). This slogan of the London Corresponding Society, England’s germinal group of radicals, suggests an incompleteness and openness that are in principle, though never in fact, totally inclusive. (This is the enduring sense of “radicalism,” from “bourgeois” to “socialist,” in political history.) I take the difference to be, as Honneth has it, “approval and support” and reciprocity rather than indistinguishability (*Struggle* 22). Each stage of Honneth’s
dialectic bears this out: the individual is not identical with the family, nor civil society, nor the state, but he or she is an “I that is We and the We that is I.” “I” preserves difference, “We” maintains identity, and the fact that the two trade places, first I as We then We as I, suggests that Hegel meant for each element, difference and identity, to sublate the other in turn.

Hegel rescues Bakhtin from utter strangeness, and Bakhtin rescues Hegel from identity. The rapprochement between the two is solidarity. What’s at stake here is the very possibility of politics. Althusser declares that “there is not, and cannot be a Hegelian politics” since he assumes that for Hegel antagonism is constantly subsumed by totality (Althusser For Marx 204). Identity permits no dissent; strangeness is dissent to the point of absurdity, non-communication. Solidarity is alliance that permits a certain level of alienation or dissent. In a dialectic with Bakhtin, Hegelian synthesis becomes not reconciliation but solidarity: a continued Hegelian politics.

The rabble or lumpenproletariat is the unfinalizable principle of negation in the Hegelian system; Bigger is the unassimilable element in society, just because he cannot be recognized, just because he is a singular person. There is no culmination or final negation for Bigger, only a series of crises or splits that alienate him from love, law, and solidarity. First, Bigger is alienated from family and friends; then, he loses the protection of the law; and finally, he loses even the solidarity of the Communists.

Native Son is a revolutionary text. Bigger negates and is negated by every institution, from family to state, to end in a position that can only countenance death or, by a perverse negative logic, face the one remaining possibility: the elsewhere of Utopia. Native Son is a series of endings, from the killing of the rat and to the killing of Bigger. The orgasm in the theater, the end of the friendship with Gus at knife-point, the killing of Mary and the gun drawn on Jan, the
speeches to the judge, the sentencing, the last conversation with Max, the shutting of the cell door. The end of the novel looks forward to but does not accomplish Bigger’s execution. Every ending is a lack of closure. The cell door opens out upon death, and also upon withered institutions, or the fearsome possibility of a post-revolutionary society: a society in which the sameness of an abstract utopian equality is negated; love becomes the principle of recognition for singularity; and solidarity—Bakhtinian synthesis—the name for the politics of recognition that brings together equality and singularity.

In this reading of Native Son I have emphasized the epistemological aspect of the narrative: its demonstration of the “truth” of recognition. This positive emphasis is a corrective to a purely ideological-critical emphasis, whereby the text obscures the truth or offers it only in a partial or distorted form. However, Wright does not offer a complete positive account of what recognition ought to be; he shows Bigger misrecognized, not recognized, and leaves it to the reader to decide on the nature of true recognition or whether such a thing is possible. I construct a solidarity or synthesis between Hegel and Bakhtin on the basis of this faltering attempt at recognition, this apparent “desire” or impulse in the text towards recognition. A negative moment of ideology critique is necessary to show the inadequacy of the text to recognize Bigger; a positive moment that draws out the ethical, political, and epistemological implication of this inadequacy is necessary to show the possibility of recognizing Bigger.

VII. Chapters

It is important to argue for the theory of genre that this study presupposes. Chapter one begins from the fact of “essential contest” over the term genre. There is dispute about what the term “genre” means, but we can nonetheless establish some “criterial properties” of what an account of genre ought to be. These criterial properties are as follows: genre is a term that (1) demands an
“essentialist” account that is shared within and across research programs, that (2) organizes texts and (3) underpins a method for analyzing them, that avoids the extremes of (4) reifying literary history with imposed categories and of (5) turning literary history into an unwieldy and anarchic realm. Genre theory must discern organization in the textual field without rigidly fixing that organization. I examine two traditions, Aristotelian and Wittgensteinian, through their respective contemporary theorists Fredric Jameson and Wai Chee Dimock, and show that neither tradition fulfills the criterial properties. A Hegelian alternative, genre as dialectic, enables one to meet the criterial properties and resolve the essential contest over the term.

Chapter two concerns the utopian novel of the 1890s in the U.S. as an exemplar of utopian writing in general. It traces a generic dialectic concerning the term equality. A properly utopian-socialist concept of equality emerged through the working-out of an ostensible contradiction between ethics and aesthetics in socialism, between egalitarianism on the one hand and drabness of culture and individual expression on the other. This contradiction indicates a larger problem of a contradiction between universal and particular within socialism: socialism, it was thought, could not accommodate any heterogeneity or difference. Both Edward Bellamy and William Dean Howells approach this problem. Bellamy does nothing to resolve it, for his compromise between universality and difference undermines egalitarianism through a system of invidious distinctions. Howells, however, develops something that I call egalitarian recognition, which is an egalitarianism that acknowledges, in a non-invidious way, individual differences. The concept of dignity attempts to reconcile the two poles of equality and difference, for it is universally shared but relative to the individual as well. The subject of dignity is dignified in particular ways. This recognition of differences may seem to resolve the contradiction between ethics and aesthetics, but it is hardly universal. Dohra Ahmad and Tom Moylan have each
criticized the failures of the fin de siècle utopias’ putative universality. Yet their critiques have not acknowledged the extent to which subsequent utopias, whether the “anti-colonial utopia” (Ahmad) or the “critical utopia” (Moylan) are indebted to, and indeed continuous with, the project of universality begun in the 1890s. It is a mistake to classify the 1890s utopia with an undifferentiated, non-dialectical tradition going back to More, since More’s utopia is explicitly marked by an exclusivity from which the utopian socialists of the 1890s strive to depart.

If chapter two begins the exploration of a socialist theory of recognition by considering utopian socialism in isolation from Marxist socialism, chapter three makes this juxtaposition explicit. The chapter on the proletarian novel begins with a problem of recognition, the problem of distinguishing between interpellation (a Marxist account) and recognition proper (a bourgeois Hegelian or Howellsian account). Thus the exploration is simultaneously generic and philosophical. The chapter is concerned with establishing the distinction between the two in a way that not only undermines the dominance of the theory of recognition, but also undermines the efficacy of the process of recognition to the extent that it obtains in the world. This double sense of undermining is accomplished not merely through refutation but through the aesthetic process of defamiliarization. If interpellation is the obviousness that holds us captive, then reading certain proletarian novels can call this obviousness into question. The chapter focuses on the relationship of love among the worst-off in society, the lumpenproletarians of Edward Dahlberg, Nelson Algren, and others, as a critique of both Marxism and liberalism. It develops the idea that recognition is fundamentally a “spiritual” rather than “material” relation: or rather, the material is subtended by the spiritual. It turns out, however, that “spiritual” is only a practical stance that one takes in relation to the other, an ethical rather than ontological stance. This spiritual relation, a person-to-person relationship of positive regard, is a precondition for any
material transformation. In this sense, “lumpenproletarian recognition” rooted in love is both a critique of, and rapprochement between, Marxism and liberalism. Utopian equality is the abstract relationship that becomes concrete in love among the “bottom dogs” of society. This concrete relationship is an ethical regard and a nascent political praxis that is developed further in chapter five’s exploration of the final stage of recognition, solidarity.

Chapter four on the radical novel synthesizes the contributions of the utopian and proletarian novels in a genre that illuminates the final relationship of recognition, solidarity, and its relationship to praxis. The problem that the essay addresses is the problem of what I call the epistemology of praxis. Knowledge of the future, I hypothesize, is a precondition for efficacious, and ethically responsible, praxis. Yet only utopian thinking, not Marxist thinking, permits knowledge of the future. On the other hand, Marxism is more epistemologically responsible than utopianism by denying that the future can be known. Here I return to Bellamy and a “lumpenproletarian novel,” Waiting for Nothing by Tom Kromer, but I focus on Robert Cantwell’s Land of Plenty as a portrayal of the spectral presence of the I.W.W. in the radical novel. The contribution of a group like the I.W.W., which came out of the utopian moment of the beginning of the twentieth century and whose presence continued to haunt the Marxism of the 1930s, was the synthesis of utopianism and Marxism with respect to the future. The structure of the I.W.W. was an instantiation of a better world here and now, a new society already within the shell of the old. From the perspective of the I.W.W., organizing was an image of the future. In this sense, praxis just was knowledge of the future. The contradiction between utopianism and Marxism, and their corresponding genres, is resolved. Both the utopian and the proletarian novels stand in the “radical” tradition: radicalism is the aspect under which both can be seen. Engels’s dialectic stands in need of revision: the scientific does not supersede the utopian, nor
vice-versa; rather, each stands in a relationship of mutual critique and affirmation; each is sublated by the common rubric of radicalism. The dialectic of the radical novel is in this sense dialogical; its synthesis is a matter of solidarity.

In the conclusion I suggest the impact my study has on a kind of praxis of utopia. Following on an analysis of the I.W.W. in chapter four and the Catholic Worker in chapter three, I show a harmony of organizing (principle of praxis) and organization (principle of utopia), that is inspired by both of these movements. I articulate this vision of utopia with my revisions to Honneth: equality as egalitarian recognition, love as lumpenproletarian recognition, solidarity as the recognition of radical praxis—are sketches, preliminary investigations, of a properly socialist (as opposed to “bourgeois”) theory of recognition. This study is ultimately a matter of insight into, and incitement to, praxis, whether that be in the dialogue of the classroom or the dialectic of organizing. I close the study with a reading of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Meridel Le Sueur, and Marge Piercy that brings unites the moments of socialism in the American Left in a single tradition of solidarity. Solidarity is finally the principle of both recognition and genre: the horizon of both ethics and literature.
Chapter 1. Genre as Dialectic

I. Genre as Essentially Contested Concept and Essence

Genre is variously characterized as a fixed, ahistorical “radical of presentation” (Northrop Frye); a historically relative “social contract” (Fredric Jameson); a kind of “fractal geometry” that surpasses the opposition of historicism and transhistoricism (Wai Chee Dimock); a transcendental law that establishes, while failing to establish, clear boundaries (Jacques Derrida); a provisional set of family resemblances that blur boundaries (Alastair Fowler); a purely empirical concept (Ralph Cohen); and a kind of a priori scheme for ordering the world (John Frow). It might be objected that such lexicographical contradiction characterizes many, or most, terms of poetics. This would be an exaggeration, however. A term like “diegesis” has remained stable since Plato. It appears in Gerald Prince’s Dictionary of Narratology. “Genre” does not.

The two major traditions of genre theory are Aristotelian and Wittgensteinian. The Aristotelian tradition maintains that “genre” has an essence. Genre is in some sense (varying according to theorists) a set of categories used to organize texts. There is a fixed set of such categories. In Aristotle’s Poetics, the perennial touchstone for genre theory, types of poetry or mimesis are minimal: the epic and drama; the dithyramb and other kinds of music (Aristotle 15). This is usually shortened to the triad of epic, drama, and lyric. Northrop Frye, a latter-day follower of Aristotle, adds a fourth term he calls “fiction.” This single category muffles an explosion of heterogeneous materials—“novel, confession, anatomy, and romance”—though fiction “could be applied in criticism to any work of literary art in a radically continuous form” (Frye 312, 303). Wittgenstein, by contrast, casts doubt on philosophy’s would-be scientific

---

7 See Ralph Cohen’s “History and Genre” for a similar catalogue of various definitions of genre (203-204).
“craving for generality,” its product of the Aristotelian desire to be like science (Blue 17). This tendency of philosophy has an analogy in genre theory’s search for “one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all” (Philosophical 31). For Wittgenstein, concepts for the most part do not designate essences but pick out overlapping traits without universally shared trait(s).

“I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities,” Wittgenstein says, “than ‘family resemblances’; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross…” (Philosophical 32). On a Wittgensteinian account, the number and nature of genres are limited only by the number of patterns one can find across a field of textuality: “raw” literary history that we might imagine prior to the ordering structure of genre.

The first choice we face in defining “genre” is the very nature of definition: do we define genre according to essence or according to use? It turns out that this is a false dilemma, for the proper use of the term is in fact a dispute about essence. This is so because of the necessity of genre having a shared function. Genre, though lacking a normative definition in the past, the present, and probably the future, is, properly used, a normative concept across and within schools of literary criticism. An account of genre is a presupposition of many acts of criticism. Genre theory is not the idiosyncratic flourish of literary criticism proper; it establishes some of the conditions of possibility for those flourishes. A Marxist program such as the one practiced by Fredric Jameson maintains a correlation between social categories and generic categories; the humanist program of Wai Chee Dimock aims to show how genre connects the particulars of cultures in transcultural ways. The proper use of “genre” entails the fragmentation of humanity into class; the proper use of genre puts humanity back together again. But the shared function of “genre” in both cases, Marxist and humanist, is to carve up and claim all of literature for its
program. An important means of this colonization of literature is to set up new boundaries and tear down others. The colonization of literature and the establishment of new boundaries is the groundwork for a research program in general. Genre is a condition of possibility for (bounded) research programs and for the critique of (the boundaries of) research programs. “Genre” functions in an analogous way to the term “research program” itself. Different research programs of criticism—historicist or formalist or psychoanalytical or whatever—will have a different conception of what counts as a research program, but a certain shared conception of program is necessary in order to make comparison and choices between programs work. The use of “genre” involves essential contest, but this contest presupposes the need for an essence.

It may be objected here that we cannot be assured of the need for an essence, or indeed anything about the definition of genre, in advance of settling on a definition. However, Charles Taylor shows how one might work, in Socratic fashion, with a “criterial property,” a necessary attribute by which we can accept or reject proposed definitions even if we do not know the definition in advance. If, as Taylor shows, we inquire into what justice is, we can eliminate some definitions solely by certain criteria: for example, the criterion that a given definition leads to a bad consequence. A criterial property of justice, according to Socrates in *The Republic*, is that it bring about only good results (Taylor 59-60). Criterial properties of “genre” also include application to more than one text, to more than one research program, and—by intention if not by effect—across research programs. A criterial property of genre is that it have an essence.

---

8 The term “research programme” [sic] derives from Imre Lakatos. It is defined by “methodological rules: some tell us what paths of research to avoid (negative heuristic) and others what paths to pursue” (positive heuristic) (Lakatos 132). As will become evident later, though, I reject such a stringently “scientific” definition for literary studies.
One essentialist approach is to stipulate a definition that is sufficiently general to cover all cases. David Fishelov stipulates a “working definition” of genre: “a combination of prototypical, representative members, and a flexible set of constitutive rules, that apply to some levels of literary texts, to some individual writings, usually to more than one individual period, and to more than one language and culture” (8, italics original). The problem with this definition, though, is its very nuance. There are no conceptions of genre that would lie outside the definition: genre consists of both prototype and flexible rules; it is not confined to any one level or subset or period or culture. While this definition has the apparent potential of defining several research programs, it would have no power to determine a new direction in research; it could only underwrite whatever proposal was offered it.

All accounts, from after Aristotle to after Wittgenstein, seem to agree on the criterial property that genre is a way of organizing an otherwise chaotic mass of texts, an organization that in turn somehow facilitates literary criticism. By this criterion of function, Fishelov’s definition holds up. But we seem always to specify something further of the organization we demand: generic categories, and the concept of genre in general, must “adequate” the texts. That is, not just any organization will do; organization must somehow conform to the objects of criticism themselves. Adequation is the relationship of correspondence of “intellect to thing” or categories to text and patterns of texts (Heidegger 120), with which literary history presents us. The axiom of adequation might seem so obvious as not to need articulation, but it plays the important function of excluding certain organizations as arbitrary: say, grouping sonnets with text messages. The reason for excluding the arbitrary is to make the practice of genre theory, and hence literary criticism, methodical: to ensure that a group of critics is engaged in roughly the same project.
The bulk of Fishelov’s study, however, is concerned with a series of metaphors of genre. If Fishelov’s literal definition is problematic for doing nothing to limit the possible configuration of genres and for undermining method, perhaps his metaphorical definition of genre is more methodologically determinate. For Fishelov, there are four major metaphors of genre that recur in genre theory: genre as biological classification, as families, as institutions, and as speech-acts. He argues that each metaphor has application to certain genres but not others. Fishelov therefore argues for a “pluralistic approach” that would employ whichever generic metaphor seems to apply best to the genre at hand: “The specific genre traditions were chosen because they lend themselves most readily to the conceptual framework suggested by a particular analogy: the epic for the biological analogy, the novel for the family ‘metaphor,’ comedy for the institutional perspective, and the lyrical *carpe diem* for the speech-act analogy” (3). He concludes that “Each [metaphor] succeeds in shedding light on different genres or on different aspects of how genres are structured, interrelated, and develop” (156). Fishelov’s metaphorical approach at first seems more promising than his abstract definition. It allows heterogeneity across genres in a way that is more concrete and specific than Frye’s thin concept of “radical of presentation.” Yet Fishelov errs in the opposite direction to Frye, for “genre” is not merely deprived of an essence, conventionally understood. It is deprived even of family resemblance. If not even overlapping family resemblances characterize the term genre in general, “genre” is reduced to the label for a series of incommensurable metaphors. The application of a single name to such incommensurability is doubtful, just as one might doubt that “religion” could characterize enthusiastic participation across a series of institutions like Maoism, football, and the Assembly of God. Further, such metaphors do not suggest much methodological potential. Rather than functioning as figures of estrangement, seeing one thing in terms of a different thing in such a
way as to fire the critical imagination, Fishelov’s metaphors of genre function tautologically: an epic is biological, the novel familial, etc. Such tautology impedes the process of discerning the relationships between genres, e.g., the genealogy of the novel in the epic, or the heritage of the sonnet in the text message.

II. A Double Bind of Literary History

A metaphor of genre seems to need to adequate literary history. Yet genre theory as the background for acts of criticism is torn between discerning some organization in literary history—rather than just imposing organization arbitrarily and retroactively—and the skeptical empirical conclusion that history lacks any intrinsic organization. Acknowledge coherence! Acknowledge dispersal! Franco Moretti finds genre to be a kind of mediating concept between the two: “Janus-like creatures, with one face turned to history and the other to form, genres are thus the true protagonists of this middle layer of literary history—this more ‘rational’ layer where flow and form meet” (14). But this formulation just describes the problem of Janus-facedness (like Sargent’s problem of three-facedness) and does not resolve it. Ralph Cohen’s “process theory of genre,” avowedly “empirical, not logical,” opts for paradox to overcome the double bind: genres “are historical assumptions constructed by authors, audiences, and critics in order to serve communicative and aesthetic purposes” (210). This paradox, however, is a flat contradiction. A purely empirical theory of genre would derive its principles from observation, not assumption; a “constructed” “historical assumption” is another way of saying an a priori principle logically prior to empirical observation and thus impossible to derive in a purely empirical way. Such a derivation would have to be induced, not assumed. In its twofold demand to acknowledge organization and flux, the double bind demands compliance with four criterial properties I have stipulated: (1) genre must organize, (2) supply a method, (3) be shared both
within and across research programs, and (4) provide an essence of what brings texts together and distances them from one another. However, in addition to the essentialist account that comprehends (1) – (4), the double bind also demands that a concept of genre must (5) acknowledge the heterogeneity of literary history itself. In the remainder of this essay, I will critique two alternative approaches to these five criterial properties and then propose a solution to the double bind that conforms to these properties.

III. Jameson on Genre

In *The Political Unconscious*, Fredric Jameson construes Frye to mean that genre is “mode,” and Jameson seems to acknowledge only two modes: realism and romance. However, it is significant that in that book he gestures towards other genres, e.g., a class of “subliterary genres” that apparently confutes the elegance of his modal binary: “gothics, mysteries, romances, bestsellers, and popular biographies (Political 107-08). And in *The Antinomies of Realism*, realism, a mode in the narrower sense, belongs to the category of genre alongside forms such as the bildungsroman or melodrama. Jameson’s genre theory is a critique of genre as reification, and specifically the reification of a “social contract”: “Genres are essentially literary institutions, or social contracts between a writer and a particular audience, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact” (Political 106). For the nineteenth-century bourgeois, realism and its “ontological commitment to the status quo as such” was a way of assuring one, against the “swiftly running stream” of the present, of the solidity of social reality (Antinomies 145).

Two levels of genre are at work here, however. There is the form of genre or the social contract(s) ideologically effective for the bourgeoisie itself: this is the reifying level of genre. But there is an opposite sense of genre that undermines ideology: this is the system of genre as
the literary critic’s own discourse, which attempts to work against reification. If the bourgeoisie approaches novels as a stable social contract, the critic perceives that the social contract is a set of principles always subject to renegotiation. Genre for the bourgeois reader is reification; genre theory for the Marxist critic is de-reification. The interesting consequence of the contrast between the two levels of genre is that Jameson commits to the existence of generic categories that are not reifications. Rather, genre theory corresponds to or reveals the reality of the social contract and the relationships between texts this contract entails. If genre for the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie was what Jameson calls a “strategy of containment” for their social anxieties, genre in the hands of the Marxist critic becomes a category that lends insight, directly into the nature of the texts and the relationships that link them, and indirectly into the “Real” to which those texts ultimately gesture.

Jameson’s genre criticism tries to demonstrate the gap between the two levels of genre: ideological and adequational. Genre is a social contract, but it can be and indeed is inevitably broken. This metaphor therefore causes some friction with Jameson’s other metaphor of a coexistence of several simultaneous genres in the same text, suggesting the constantly transitional state of mode of production: “genre theory must always in one way or another project a model of the coexistence or tension between several generic modes or strands….” (Political 141). Jameson’s sense of “dialectical” criticism illuminates the difference between the two levels: it studies both the object of analysis and the categories employed to carry out the analysis: “Dialectical thinking can be characterized as historical reflexivity that is, as the study of an object… which also involves the study of the concepts and categories (themselves historical) that we necessarily bring to the object” (Political 109). For Jameson, genre theory measures the gap between concept (generic categories) and object (texts). Realism consists of an interplay
between “unnamable” particularity and “universalizing stereotypes.” In its constant instantiation of new particularity, realism continually opposes reification but inevitably succumbs to reification when that particularity is subsumed under new rubrics (Antinomies 144-145). Genre theory is supposed to decisively transcend the dialectic by grasping the essence of genre: a fluctuating series of social contracts. By unveiling the essence of genre, Jameson apparently satisfies the first criterion of organization and the fourth criterion of essence.

It is not clear why, though, with all this acknowledgement of textual flux, Jameson would remain committed to Frye’s categories of realism and romance. These categories, it seems, name reifications at the first (ideological) level of genre and do not adequate texts at the second (non-ideological) level of genre theory. They cannot function simultaneously as reification for the bourgeoisie and demystification for the critic. Hence the appearance of organization is illusory. Further, these organizing categories are heterogeneous with the “subgenres” and sit uneasily next to a “genre” like the Bildungsroman. In Antinomies of Realism, realism is a property of the Bildungsroman, so it is not clear how it can be a genre proper to itself. Jameson uses “realism” sometimes as mode and sometimes as genre:

Besides melodrama as such (considered as a genre), I will briefly touch on four more of the new genres or sub-genres characteristic of realism. These are the Bildungsroman, the historical novel, the novel of adultery, and naturalism—taking this last now as a new type of narrative, rather than as a perfectly natural and evolutionary expansion of realism itself. (Antinomies 145)

It is unclear here whether naturalism remains a form of realism. Later Jameson speaks of this list as the “sub-genres that emerge from realism” (152). However, Jameson seems to place realism alongside the novel in the same category as genre proper: “[T]here exists one final form of genre
which it is virtually impossible for realism to dissolve without completely undoing itself in the process: and that is the novel itself” (161). So naturalism is ambiguously a subgenre of realism, and realism is a genre distinct from the novel. Finally, Jameson speaks of the “realist novel,” implying that realism is not a genre unto itself but a kind of mode that modifies the novel.  

Jameson’s generic organization, which attempts to adequate the “swiftly running stream of the present,” is constrained by Aristotelian modal and generic categories. It is not, however, adherence to Aristotle that motivates Jameson’s appeal to this mix of genres and modes; it is, ironically, adherence to the dialectician Marx. As a methodical critique of ideology, Jameson’s dialectical program requires the consistent use of terms, since the terms themselves are meant to adequate the reality of the social contract and the interrelated texts under investigation. But if the organization is suspect, so is the method, since a primary function of genre-theoretical method just is the discernment of organization. Therefore this dialectical theory of genre fails to satisfy criteria (1) and (2). But if it does not satisfy these, then it can hardly meet the demand of criterion (3) as a viable shared research program, despite the success of The Political Unconscious as such a program.

What about criterial property (5), the criterion of conformity to literary history itself? Jameson’s justification of genre theory is ultimately its relationship to the structure of history as such, the relation between mode of emplotment and mode of production (the Real). In his conception of the “mediatory function of the notion,” then, “genre…allows the coordination of immanent formal analysis of the individual text with the twin diachronic perspective of the history of forms and the evolution of social life” (Political 105). What to make of the metaphor

---

9 See Frow for the distinction between genre as the category that mode qualifies (Genre 65).
“twin”? Is “coordination” a kind of correspondence, a kind of adequation? The modal structure of genre theory is interestingly similar to “the overlay and structural coexistence of several modes of production all at once” (Political 95, emphasis original). This “coordination” covers over an ambiguity between the two uses of “genre” in Jameson’s theory. On the one hand, genre as “immanent formal analysis” is adequational; the theory corresponds to the form. On the other hand, genre reveals the “evolution of social life”: and here Jameson refers to the mediated relationship between social contract and mode of production. In fact, the ideological sense of genre as social contract has a true, if highly mediated, relationship to the Real: the structure of genre is a series of “sign systems” that are “traces or anticipations of modes of production” (Political 76). Genre theory provides the key to this interpretation, but via allegory rather than adequation. Genre theory serves the more modest office of adequating the social contract and the texts themselves. Genre theory, then, does not provided an unmediated relationship of adequation between category and the Real of mode of production, but it does provide a relationship of adequation (a) between generic category (e.g., realism) and realist social contract (a strategy of containment for anxieties about social instability); and (b) between generic category and the individual texts themselves (e.g., Madame Bovary). But the two levels of genre, ideological and non-ideological, converge in function here, for the category of realism no more adequately the flux of realist texts than the realist texts adequately the stream of the present. If genre is a reification, so is Jameson’s genre theory. Its response to the acknowledgement of the heterogeneity of literary history is reification, so Jameson’s theory does not meet criterial property (5) any more than it does (1) through (4). In the attempt to establish a relationship of adequation between concept and object, Jameson’s theory founders on reification.
IV. Dimock on Genre

Wai Chee Dimock tries to avoid the problem of reification and to acknowledge historical flux by adopting a Wittgensteinian alternative to the Aristotelian tradition. Dimock contrasts her approach with the crude view (attributed to no one, because no one subscribes to it!) that genres are “a neat catalog of what exists” (“Introduction” 1378). She presupposes that literary history is too fluid to be ultimately constrained by a more “theoretical” approach to categories, so she goes for an “empirical” approach. Her definition attempts to satisfy criterial property (5) with a set of metaphors that emphasizes flux and dynamism (“Introduction” 1378). Dimock offers a fecund and paradoxical mix of metaphors for genre. Genre is “a self-obsoleting system, a provisional set that will always be bent and pulled and stretched by its many subsets….‘Genre is much less of a pigeonhole than a pigeon,’ Alasdair Fowler has suggested” (Continent 73-74). But here Dimock reveals a wish to acknowledge both properties (1), organization, and (5), flux. Her concept of genre therefore offers itself as an ideal approach to the double bind. Dimock describes genre both as system, an organizing pattern with the connotation of stasis, and a pigeon, an organism with its connotation of flight; she employs a similar ambiguity when imagining a “kinship network…resting always on some kind of fluid continuum, with tributaries flowing into every individual instance” (“Introduction” 1380). These characterizations of genre function like koans to debunk the search for an essence and to preempt reification. She stipulates that genre is like kinship and family, but denies that these metaphors imply “necessarily a genealogical connection” (Continent 74); they have “less to do with common ancestry than with a convergence of attributes…” [74]). Generic organization “has little to do with linear descent” (75). This mix of metaphors ostensibly helps one to organize without cramping one’s style. Yet Dimock’s use of “genre,” while discouraging the search for specific differences, could be
paraphrased without loss of meaning as “intertextuality,” or even more blandly, as “similarity.”

The terms are clearly not synonymous, however; genre, even in a would-be anti-essentialist form, connotes a peculiar kind of organization, a “network” that lends a massive coherence not merely contingent on this or that resemblance.

Accordingly, Dimock recognizes the need for a unifying metaphor—an essence—if genre is to do its organizing job. As talk of threads piles atop talk of angles, Dimock requires a mediating, unifying concept, which she finds in “fractal geometry” (Continents 75-78). This mathematical pursuit rejects angles in favor of “shapes with serried outlines: the wispy puffs of clouds, the lacy fronds of ferns, the pocked and porous surface of a sponge, the coiled dimensions inside a ball of twine” (76). The virtue of fractal geometry is that, by making length relative to scale, it “make[s] length indeterminate” (76). Therefore, apparent diachronic barriers, such as that between epic and novel, may be telescoped or bypassed. Fractal geometry allows one to take into account and compare incommensurable levels of scale, allowing for the fresh possibility of literary studies being “energized by the feedback loops between the very large and the very small” (77). Hence fractal geometry allows a kind of complete account of generic relationships, “one that is robust at all scales, keeping track of kinship at every level” (78). With fractal scale kinship returns, but in too unfamiliar a form to accommodate descent. Despite her attachment to the master-metaphor, coherent definition itself seems too constraining for Dimock’s proposal. Thus she interweaves entropy and system: “what this geometry allows us to see is a tangle of relations, one that counts as a ‘system’ precisely because its aberrations are systemwide, because pits and bumps come with many loops and layers of filiation” (Continents 78). If the function of Jameson’s metaphor of the social contract is roughly to give a class
analysis of culture, the function of Dimock’s unlimited metaphors is to provide a sense of human universality that yet preserves the particularity of particular cultures and artifacts.

The disconcerting consequence of Dimock’s mix of metaphors here, however, is that they exhaust the possibilities of relationship. Any imaginable intertextual thread would count as properly generic with this model of both “system” and “tangle.” In practice, one could justify any relationship by saying that either (a) the relationship between texts x and y is systematic, or (b) the relationship is aberrant, or (c) it’s both. Genre ends up being the name for just any relationship between texts, yet one that still, through the continued invocation of “kind,” retains a misleading residue of Aristotelian desire, the desire (1) to organize, (2) to supply a method, and (3) to be shared within and across research programs.

Though Dimock does acknowledge (5), the flux of literary history, genre for Dimock does not function as a shared presupposition of a research program; it avoids reification, but it does not provide organization or method. Its mix of metaphors, despite the privilege given the image of fractal geometry, is too messy to furnish an essence. Dimock’s genre theory functions as the idiosyncrasy of the act of literary criticism, not the methodological underpinnings of such an act. This theory cannot perform a unifying function for acts of criticism, much less function systematically, because it attempts to make the categories of genre as fluid as one might imagine the flux of history to be “in itself.” Here the impulse to adequate that flux, to sculpt one’s theory to its movements, might be called into question. I might suggest that Dimock jettison the term “genre” entirely in favor of the term “intertextuality,” but if the loose use of genre is problematic just because of its lack of method, then a fortiori intertextuality would fail to determine the movements of a research program.
Gallie’s essential contest over the concept of genre reduces to a certain double bind for doing literary history. It is significant that Gallie, nearing the end of his lecture and faced with the apparently irresolvable logical problem of concepts that are necessarily the subject of essential contest, is vague about a practical solution. He suggests that the acknowledgement of essential contestedness should lead to a liberal attitude, the humane approach of “conversion” via persuasion of rival parties rather than imposition of one’s beliefs on them (193-94). Gallie views essential contest from a perspective apparently above the ideological fray, yet he acknowledges that that fray is inevitable. It would be easy to deconstruct and dismiss as ideological Gallie’s neutrality. But his liberalism affirms the indispensable values of disagreement in the humanities and dissent in matters of religion and politics. It is important to find a theory of genre that preserves Gallie’s liberalism while engaging in the ideological fray; that somehow takes account of both the Marxists and the humanists, the historicists and the formalists, etc., etc., while giving a definition of genre that will help us to make sense of the very notion of a research program. What is needed is a solution to the predicament of essential contestedness that is both liberal and decisive. It would allow for disagreement and dissent; it would satisfy criterial properties (1) through (5); it would overcome the double bind.

V. A Solution to the Double Bind

Observing a recalcitrant debate in the philosophy of language, Frank P. Ramsey recommended the following response: we ought to discern a suspicious common presupposition of both positions, negate that presupposition, and propose a third, alternative possibility: “In such cases it is a heuristic maxim that the truth lies not in one of the two disputed views but in some third possibility, which has not yet been thought of, which we can only discover by rejecting something assumed as obvious by both the disputants” (Ramsey 115-16). Nicholas Rescher
applies “Ramsey’s maxim” to what he calls “aporetic clusters,” or a series of plausible statements that entail a contradiction. He observes the similarity of this maxim, which involves making distinctions that will preserve the insight of the aporetic statements while transcending them, to Hegelian logic: “…a satisfactory resolution of aporetic clusters must somehow make room for all parties to the contradiction. The introduction of distinctions thus represents a Hegelian ascent that rises above the level of antagonistic positions to that of a ‘higher’ conception in which the opposites are reconciled” (Rescher 39). What I have been calling a double bind or contradictory double imperative works analogously to an aporetic cluster. The two imperatives, to acknowledge flux and to posit organization, imply statements about the field of textuality: that it is always in flux but that it has some discernable organization.

Jameson’s genre theory may maintain that genre itself is only a “trace” of a mode of production, but the point I make here is that his conception of genre is supposed to be an adequation of texts. Jameson denies adequation to the “Real” but maintains a relationship of adequation between his genre theory and the “Symbolic” order of texts—novels in particular—themselves.

The suspicious presupposition of both of these statements, both imperatives, is the presupposition that genre theory must adequate literary history; there must be accordance or correspondence between theory (metaphor of genre) and object (the texts themselves). Now, this presupposition may seem self-evident, equivalent to the assumption that the theory be correct, and I hardly want to complain about that assumption, which is nothing more than a tautology: a theory, to be acceptable, must be correct. Yet adequation may be contrasted with an alternative that also has a claim to correctness but that avoids reification and unlimited flux. That alternative to adequation is dialectic. Yet a negation of the assumption of adequation must be followed with
an alternative solution to the double bind. One that presents itself is some form of “dialectic” or mediation between opposites.

Phillip E. Wegner has proposed something like a theory of genre-as-dialectic in his *Imaginary Communities*. He presents the theory of genre as a “dialectical model” that “negates” the two options of “positivism”—the assertion that genre is an objective fact—and an assertion that only individual texts have objective status. He, too, then, is responding to a dilemma, but one in which the very use of the term “genre” is at stake. The double bind that I have been discussing, however, is not a question of whether to wield the concept of genre but how, once some concept of genre is accepted, we decide which concept to accept. And none of the available options are acceptable, as I have been arguing. In responding to his own dilemma, Wegner wants to negate the demand for facts *tout court* and rather define genre as an “institution.” He clarifies what he means by institution by invoking Heidegger: genre possesses what Martin Heidegger names *Dasein*, or ‘being-in-the-world.’ As with the particular embodiment of these other institutional forms, the works composing any genre make palpable, in the course of their narrative realization, a self-interpreting ‘awareness’ of what it means to be part of this institution and its history. Such a self-interpretation becomes evident both in the ways each participant in the generic institution engages with the possibilities and potentialities of its predecessors—the existence or being-in-the-world of the individual text placed in a background of shared social practices that are sometimes referred to by the abstraction ‘generic conventions’—and also in its particular remaking of the institution in response to the desires and interests of its unique historical context. (4-5)
Wegner brings in Heidegger rather than Hegel, human being rather than spirit, to explain his “dialectical” theory of genre, or what he means by a genre’s “self-awareness” as definitive of its “existence.” And rather than return to the notion of a dialectic as a communicative interaction between entities, Wegner brings in Bakhtin to say that “the narrative utopia engage[s] simultaneously in a number of…dialogic relationships: with the traditions of utopian writing that both precede and follow them; with the broader literary and intellectual presents they inhabit; with their variously situated readers; and, finally, with the concerns of the larger cultural and social realities in which they first appear” (5). This reliance on Bakhtin resonates with my own contention, argued in the introduction above, that the Hegelian dialectic must be dialogized if it is to be ethically and politically acceptable. Yet Bakhtin without Hegel is, as I hope to have shown, is explicitly anti-dialectical. It is therefore curious that Wegner would preserve the term “dialectical” and try to marry Heidegger and Bakhtin, two openly anti-dialectical thinkers. Hegel would seem more obviously appropriate to Wegner’s stipulations for genre: Hegel attributes a growing self-awareness to entities over time; Hegel has his own sort of dialogue among entities. Further, Heideggerian self-awareness and Bakhtinian dialogism are not consistent. Despite Wegner’s orthodox rejection of generic “essentialism,” he still affirms an essential unity to a genre—in some sense a “self” in some sense constituted by genre. But Bakhtin implies fragmentation, genre not as one but many voices that, he maintains, resist synthesis. For Bakhtin, not even an individual text can have self-awareness in any coherent sense, composed as it is by many selves (The Brothers Karamazov with the brothers’ competing worldviews and personalities is Bakhtin’s exemplary text here): even the consciousness of author and character strain against one another. If no text can have self-awareness, it is highly implausible that a genre can have self-awareness, except in the vague sense that the novel is aware of a multiplicity of
awarenesses. There is no “self” to genre, though there is an essence in the sense of an essential contest subject to a dialectic.

My sense of “dialectic” recovers a Hegelian logic that preceded Marx, a logic untethered from the economic base and thus released to travel through a utopian realm of “spirit” or discourse itself. Dialectic in Hegel’s sense is the process of reaching contradiction between or within phenomena then overcoming that contradiction at some higher level in which the prior phenomena are destroyed. But this destruction preserves the virtues of those prior phenomena and gives rise to a higher—more true, good, or coherent—form. The phenomena are thus transformed into something closer to absolute truth or complete goodness. At times Hegel seems to endorse the theory of truth as adequation. According to Michael Inwood, Hegel subscribes to the theory of adequation “as, e.g., the ‘identity of thinking and being’ or the ‘agreement of the subjective and the objective’” (299). Indeed, in the Introduction to Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel writes that the “goal” of knowledge is the moment at which “knowledge no longer needs to go beyond itself, where knowledge finds itself, where Notion corresponds to object and object to Notion” (51, cf. 53). But this kind of correspondence is not the whole story; indeed, it’s a misleading story. Hegel takes up and sublates the theory of correspondence or adequation within his final view of truth, which is truth as resolution of contradiction. The contradiction immanent within or between phenomena, when resolved, becomes truth. Yet this truth is only provisional and gives rise to a new contradiction. The truth of one stage may be found in a subsequent stage, even though the latter is its own way partial, flawed, and self-contradictory (Inwood 300). On this view, truth consists of contradiction perpetually driven to non-contradiction. But that non-contradiction in turn becomes contradiction. The bondsman, for instance, is the truth of the lord (116-17), and the object fashioned by the bondsman’s labor is in turn the truth of the bondsman
In these two examples, truth is indeed the resolution of a contradiction, but contradiction still persists: that is, the resulting resolution is a fractured whole and thus falls short of the True. The lord has lost and retained his status; the bondsman remains tied to as well as liberated by his work. The ruler disappears yet continues as a phantom power, and the slave becomes a stoic, turning inward to preserve his liberation in the face of a still-hostile external world. Later Hegel looks back on these stages of the enslaved consciousness as moments of truth: “we saw the Stoical independence of pure thought pass through Scepticism and find its truth in the Unhappy Consciousness—the truth about what constitutes its own true being” (293). Yet in the next stage the Unhappy Consciousness is superseded by the consciousness of Reason. The True in the ultimate sense remains elusive.

Adequation suggests a happy marriage—a relationship of truth—between language and object. Often Hegel talks as if an entity is truth; sometimes he says it has truth; herein lies an dissonance between two conceptions of truth that might, in the latter case, warrant a Hegelian theory of adequation. For instance, “the object only has truth so far as it has the form of the self,” and each moment of the dialectic, even immediacy, has a certain truth (324, 391). Truth is a kind of approximation or approach to the True in the ultimate sense: adequate in some degree if not absolutely. As Inwood observes, Hegel ascribes truth to material things as well as to propositions and beliefs (on the assumption that propositions and beliefs are not material things) (Inwood 298). In a banal sense, Hegel concedes that a proposition may (partially) adequate reality. Yet he often refers to that reality as “the True.” Hegel uses “the True” as an equivalent expression to “the actual” or “the actuality,” as in his statement that the “true being of a man is rather his deed; in this the individual is actual” and that “consciousness becomes what it is in truth” (193, 244). Adequation, on the other hand, is a kind of correspondence to the actual: “The proposition
should express *what* the True is; but essentially the True is Subject” (40). Propositions are true to
the extent that they adequately the True. This tautology does no work in Hegel’s system. Yet his
sense of ultimate truth is more robust. For Hegel the proposition is descriptive of rather than
identical to reality—and only this identity, or the object subsumed momentarily into the subject,
constitutes the True. Though this definition of the true, the “Substance that is essentially
Subject,” constitutes the “system” of the dialectic as a whole, that system is not static but
processual, curving back on itself in a circle as if perpetually to start the “labor of the negative”
again (14). So Hegel continues: “As such [the True] is merely the dialectical movement, this
course that generates itself, going forth from, and returning to, itself” (40). “System” suggests the
cessation of movement, and Hegel characterizes the return of the Subject into itself from its
alienation in the other as a state of “tranquil unity certain of its [own] truth” (143). But even this
tranquil unity is subjected to opposition or restless movement. “For this unity that movement is
the ‘other,’” observes Hegel,

while for this movement that tranquil unity is the ‘other’; and consciousness and
object alternate within these reciprocal determinations. Thus on the one hand
consciousness finds itself moving about searching here and there, its object being
the *pure in-itself* and essence; on the other hand, it knows of the different
moments. Consciousness, however, as essence is this whole process itself, of
passing out of itself as simple category into a singular individual, into the object,
and of contemplating this process in the object, nullifying the object as distinct
[from it], *appropriating* it as its own, and proclaiming itself as this certainty of
being all reality, of being both itself and its object. (143-44).
Even this certainty of the stage of Reason—“Spirit when its certainty of being all reality has been raised to truth” (263)—however, has not attained the whole truth of the system. The system is a circle in which, like Hegel’s Bacchanalian revelers who drop out of the dance and are immediately replaced, stasis seems to sublate negative movement: “The True is thus the Bacchanalian revel in which no member is not drunk; yet because each member collapses as soon as he drops out, the revel is just as much transparent and simple repose” (27). Thus “Only this self-restoring sameness…is the True. It is the process of its own becoming, the circle that presupposes its end as its goal, having its end also as its beginning; and only by being worked out to its end, is it actual” (10). Yet the wonder of the Bacchanalian image is its simultaneous invocation of stasis and frenzied movement. Hegel clarifies the nature of the movement towards the True consists by invoking the example of perception, during which consciousness “has experienced in perception that the outcome and the truth of perception is its dissolution…” (71). Hegel grants that the proposition in some sense corresponds to or expresses truth, but the truth itself, that to which the proposition corresponds, is the Subject. The Subject, in turn, is not merely the isolated “I.” Two tensions, then, need to be resolved: between adequation and contradiction; and between process and stasis. As I have suggested, adequation is a correspondence to the True; it is not the True itself. Yet Hegel seems to make the True static, a final identity that ends the negative, contradictory movement of the dialectic, or that cancels that negation in a kind of circle that constantly works against the diremption. The closure of the circle, however, remains always beyond the curve of the dialectic’s horizon. And the redeeming metaphor of the circle suppresses the negative, diremptive aspect of the dance, dancers being excluded from the whole just at the moment they are overwhelmed by it. Genre as dialectic, then,
sees in each genre a process of conversation or argument that develops a project towards the realization of certain aims.

VI. Hegel’s Theory of Genre

This sketch of a Hegelian theory of truth must be articulated with a Hegelian theory of genre, which appears in Hegel’s lectures on aesthetics. Hegel’s account of genre is triadic in structure. The history of art is the progressive development of three kinds of art: symbolic (the expression of the Idea of the beautiful in a natural object), classical (the unity of the Idea with the artifice of sculpture), and romantic (the Idea expressed in architecture, sculpture, and poetry). On the face of it, the theory of genre is a theory of adequation, for each form of art is related to an Idea of the beautiful, such that “the content of art is the Idea, and that its form lies in the plastic use of images accessible to sense. These two sides art has to reconcile into a full and united totality” (Introductory 76). This totality constitutes a “world”: the beautiful “unfolds itself in the several arts and in their creations into a world of actualized beauty” (89). Further, Hegel equates this Idea or world of the beautiful, the content of art, with truth, for the “content of this world is the beautiful, and the true beautiful…is spiritual being in concrete shape, the Ideal; or, more closely looked at, the absolute mind, or truth itself” (89). This truth may be expressed through mimesis or other “represent[ation] to perception and to feeling,” but it is nonetheless “divine truth” in its capacity as revelation of the beautiful (89).

In a crucial sense, the truth of art is the truth of adequation. This is not “adequation of thought to being”; it is a different but analogous form of mimesis. The totality towards which art strives is not the happy marriage of representation to material reality but of representation to Idea. This Idea Hegel calls “concrete content” such that he speaks of the “correspondence” of “concrete content” and “sensuous form and modelling” (77). This correspondence or style of
mimesis is different in the case of symbolic and classical form. The former stage, nascent and crude art, seems to set up a more or less arbitrary kind of Saussurean relationship between symbol and content, e.g. lion and strength (83); the latter or classical form is adequation in the sense not of correspondence but unity, “the free and adequate embodiment of the Idea in the shape that, according to its conception, is peculiarly appropriate to the Idea itself” (84). In characterizing the relationship between form and content here, Hegel strains against the limits of the distinctions introduced by language, the grammar of “adequate” and “appropriate,” for in fact there is no such division between form and content; neither, however, can stone be flatly identified with the Idea. If the classical form of art comes close to instantiating some kind of adequation, however, the romantic form of art explicitly resists adequation, “destroy[ing] the completed union of the Idea and its reality, and recur[ing], though in a higher phase, to that difference and antagonism of the two aspects which was left unvanquished by symbolic art” (85). The irony of romantic art, however, is that it is more true than classical art. It is more true because, though it has lost its state of reconciliation between form and Idea, it now expresses the real state of discord between the two. In romantic art the apparently “perfect amalgamation of spiritual and sensuous existence” is shown to be illusory, for “in such an amalgamation Mind cannot be represented according to its true notion. For mind is the infinite subjectivity of the Idea, which, as absolute inwardness, is not capable of finding free expansion in its true nature on condition of remaining transposed into a bodily medium as the existence appropriate to it” (85-86).

A contradiction turns out to have inhered in classical art between finite form and infinite content, so it turns out that even the adequation as unity does not obtain. Romantic art replaces sensuous existence with “self-conscious inward intelligence” (86, emphasis original). The
manifest objective surface of classical art gives way to subjective depth of romantic art. Hegel calls this a freedom from “immediate existence,” or the obviously empirical (87); this freedom is thereby a severing of any necessary connection between representation and empirical world. “In conformity with such an object-matter,” Hegel explains, art cannot work for sensuous perception” (87). At the same time, this conformity between art and the “inner world” is a kind of “reconciliation,” and “this type of Art, like every other, needs an external vehicle of expression” (87). Yet this vehicle by its very external nature is inadequate to its content.

Nonetheless, the romantic forms of art are the truest because of their special internal relationship to spirit. This relationship of truth, however, is beyond correspondence: it is not the “attainment” of the “true Idea of beauty” but its “transcendence” (88). The triadic logic of the three types of art is repeated in the progression that constitutes the three genres of romantic art: painting, music, and poetry. In the highest form of romantic art, poetry, adequation is decisively sublated as the arbitrary “sensuous element” of sound frees poetry from its content (95). In this sublation poetry is revealed to be “the universal art of the mind which has become free in its own nature” and, in its medium of “poetical imagination and intellectual portrayal itself,” poetry turns out to be immanent in all types of art (96). Therefore, insofar as all art—symbolic, classical, or romantic—is imbued with the spirit of poetry, art is not a correspondence to the Idea but an instantiation of it: “what the particular arts realize in individual works of art are according to their abstract conception simply the universal types which constitute the self-unfolding Idea of beauty” (97). With respect to art, beauty is truth, truth beauty.

One might object, following Fishelov, that this essence, this “dialectic,” is itself, like “institution” or “fractal geometry” or “radical of presentation,” no more than another metaphor. But a couple of caveats persuade me against talking this way. The first is that this way of putting
it downplays the power of a metaphor, when, as Milan Kundera puts it, “Metaphors are not to be
trifled with. A single metaphor can give birth to love” (Unbearable 11). But more to the point, I
would say, pace Fishelov, that we are not even dealing with metaphors. It is tempting to treat the
multiplicity of concepts of genre as if they were so many competing metaphors, yet such a
construal of the essential contest as a matter of metaphor implies an opposition to literal
language, when in fact the whole problem of the essential contest is that we have no idea what
the literal “fact” of genre is or would even look like. If we did, presumably we could dispense
with all this endless contest (of which the present chapter is just an unpleasant taste). To call a
concept of genre a metaphor is to imply the fantasy that there is a literal concept of genre just
beyond our reach, yet which a better metaphor can approach or approximate. Indeed, the twin
fantasy of metaphoricity and literality is a shared presupposition of both the Aristotelian and
Wittgensteinian traditions of genre theory. If all language is metaphorical, and metaphor entails
an opposition to the literal, and the literal does not exist, then it is nonsense to say that all
language is metaphorical.

The poststructuralist doctrine of the thoroughgoing metaphoricity of language in fact is a
vestige of the notion of adequation between language and reality. It presupposes that the concept
of literality still makes sense; the literal, though it does not obtain in reality, remains
conceptually the language that “adequates” in contrast to the metaphorical that merely coheres
(or fails to cohere, as the case may be). What would happen if, again following Ramsey, we
dispense with that binary opposition of literal and metaphorical and instead construed the
adequacy of a theory of genre to literary history in a different way? I suggest that we determine
the “adequacy” of a theory of genre not in terms of adequation or correspondence between genre
and literary history but in terms of problems immanent to the history of genre theory and
criticism. The virtue of construing genre is not to adequate literary history but to establish a condition for the possibility of doing literary history. Construing genre as dialectic is a way of telling a story of literary history that is free of aporia. And it has salutary consequences.

The first of these consequences is the possibility that a theory of genre as dialectic opens for a richer theory of the discourses (genres) involved in the study of literature. Genre as dialectic, which is a process that is at once narrative and argument, shows the interpenetration and interrelationship between various genres, say, of literature and philosophy. Genre as dialectic is argument, but it is narrative “all the way down.” This way of putting it, however, might mislead one into the claim that narrative is some privileged or primordial sort of discourse—a claim that accommodates the colonizing tendencies of literary studies. But the form of dialectic is both narrative and argument and thus does not “privilege” literature over philosophy. It discerns rather the narrative element and the rhetorical element in each of them, the philosophy in literature and the literature in philosophy. In the studies that follow, literature and philosophy operate as parallel and sometimes interpenetrating genres, sometimes contradictory and sometimes complementary. Their dialectical character, both internal and in relation to one another, is dialogical, a relationship of solidarity. The second of these consequences is ethical and is closely related to the first. Genre as dialectic, as the self-awareness of a discourse that enables a project of self-awareness, is an ethical project that draws on the multiple “voices” of various discourses. To return to and reappropriate Bakhtin for the present (somewhat Hegelian) ends, genre as dialectic shows the dialectic here between monologism and dialogism. Genre as dialectic is fundamentally “interdisciplinary,” but a better way to put it might be Susan Buck-Morss’s term “undisciplined.”
If genre theory is a condition of possibility for the practice of the genre of literary criticism—and, perhaps, philosophy, too, insofar as both philosophy and criticism need to be aware of their boundaries (and the potential to break out of them)—then genre theory is an enabling condition for doing ethics as well: for exploring, for example, the implications of this representation of recognition, or that representation of individualism. A proper understanding of the genre of tragedy, for instance, may inform one’s understanding of anagnorisis or recognition, which in turn might impact one’s moral thinking. Thus we might have an interesting dialogue between Aristotle’s Poetics and his Nicomachean Ethics. But as I have just observed, genre-as-dialectic is already ethical, insofar as its dialectic incorporates voices that are negated, preserved, and elevated, both within genres and across them. I hope to substantiate this sketch of a dialectical theory of genre in the studies that follow.

VII. The Dual-Aspect Theory of Genre

In what follows I would like to flesh out the two senses in which genre is dialectic: the intertextual sense of relationships among texts and the intratextual sense of the internal dynamic of a single text. The intertextual sense is an argument among texts over time: the argument, for instance, of the nature of a society structured around feminist values: for example, the dialectic

10 Anagnorisis is the Aristotelian moment of revelation that should be distinguished from Hegelian Anerkennung. Aristotle defines recognition or anagnorisis as “a shift from ignorance to awareness, pointing in the direction either of close blood ties or of hostility, of people who have previously been in a clearly marked state of happiness or unhappiness” (Poetics 36). However, both kinds of recognition concern a moment of acknowledging the truth of the other, if we take the English/French sense of recognition, which involves an epistemological process. Honneth notes that Anerkennung lacks a cognitive meaning in German.
that can be traced from the early Socialism of Charlotte Perkins Gilman to the Old Left tendency towards “workerism” of Meridel Le Sueur to the New Left recognitive and redistributive emphases of Marge Piercy. I will explore this intertextual process from Gilman to Piercy in the conclusion to this study, but for now I simply want to float the idea of such a dialectic, and draw a distinction between on the one hand this intertextual dialectic, a synchronic and diachronic argument (I hope to show how both of these are the case), and on the other hand an intratextual dialectic. An example of the latter is the finally synthetic or solidaristic tension in Le Sueur’s *The Girl* between workerism and a kind of recognitive politics based on gender and the specific capabilities of women—childbearing and, Le Sueur argues, a certain kind of revolutionary nonviolence. It may seem odd—even perverse—to talk about the “argument” of a narrative, particularly in a lyrical text like Le Sueur’s, far from the stereotyped didacticism or agitprop of the proletarian novel (though below I will try to undermine this stereotype to a certain extent). I therefore want to clarify what I mean by argument and show its essential consistency with narrative, its aesthetic quality and its difference from, e.g., the essay form.

The sense of generic dialectic that is both intertextual and intratextual and that enables both argument and narrative I call the *dual-aspect theory of genre*. So genre-as-dialectic is characterized by a dual aspect, the aspect of argument and aspect of narrative. To begin to show the workings of the dual aspect of texts and intertextuality, I will invoke a crude and provisional opposition, *telling* and *showing*. “Telling” usually suggests using vague and abstract propositions (“he was warm”) as opposed to “showing,” which roughly means offering concrete detail (“sweat trickled down his ribs”). Showing suggests an illustration in concrete terms—telling a story or giving a description about what recognition does or does not, should or should not, “look like”; telling is a description or prescription in the abstract. Apparently, showing is a potentially
narrative mode: some showing involves a sequence or diachrony of “events” and a population of “existents” articulated in a conflict culminating in a denouement, to use Seymour Chatman’s terms (19). \footnote{In the structuralist vein, Chatman analyzes the basic structure of narrative as follows: “…each narrative has two parts: a story (histoire), the content or chain of events (actions, happenings), plus what may be called the existents (characters, items of setting); and a discourse (discours), that is, the expression, the means by which the content is communicated” (19).} Telling is also potentially a narrative mode but lacks the detail that usually characterizes existents and events; its difference from showing, however, is that it is able to articulate propositions and arguments of which those propositions are a part. However, the concept of dialectic shows that the two modes, telling and showing, are not mutually exclusive but can coexist in the same discourse in a complementary way.

Two of the most important books in the Western philosophical tradition “lay bare” this twofold structure of narrative and argument. These are The Republic and the Phenomenology of Spirit. The Republic recounts a single night of argument into the nature of justice. The progress of the argument—its sequence of interlocutors, for instance, and corresponding proposals and reductios ad absurdum—the Socratic dialogue tells a story built around argument and counter-argument. The Phenomenology of Spirit describes “stages” in the progress of “knowing” from a naïve immediacy to a sophisticated union of subject and object in “absolute knowing.” Spirit is a kind of protagonist and these stages plot points. As Jean Hyppolite notes of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit, the dialectic also resembles the structure of a Bildungsroman. After reviewing some of the German philosophical tradition on which Hegel drew, Hyppolite observes that “the influence of the Bildungsromanen of the time seems to us to have been just as important….Through a series of experiences, each [Goethe’s and Novalis’s heroes] comes to
abandon his first conviction: what had been a truth becomes an illusion….Hegel’s

*Phenomenology*...is the novel of philosophic formation” (Hyppolite 11-12). Hyppolite

emphasizes, however, that what Hegel understood himself to be doing was not literature but

science; the novel is in some sense “arbitrary,” while science has an “internal necessity” (12).

This point seems to be derived from the passage in the preface that draws the distinction between

the system of the truth’s “nature” and “systematic exposition” in contrast to “the shape in which
time sets forth the sequential existence of its moments”:

The inner necessity that knowing should be Science lies in its nature, and only the

systematic exposition of philosophy itself provides it. But the *external* necessity, so far as it is grasped in a general way, setting aside accidental matters of person and motivation, is the same as the inner, or in other words it lies in the shape in which time sets forth the sequential existence of its moments. (*Phenomenology* 3)

This distinction between system and sequence, however, should not be taken as a denial that narrative is constitutive of philosophy; *pace* Hyppolite, it should be observed the preface begins with the rejection of the idea that an argument can be presented by furnishing the “results” beforehand and an affirmation of the alternative, that assessment of “the diversity of philosophical systems” is “the progressive unfolding of truth” (1-2). Hegel illustrates this unfolding in the metaphor of the progress of a plant from bud to blossom to fruit, each entity becoming the “truth” of the plant in turn and each form “mutually incompatible” with the others (2). The reliance on metaphor is not accidental but essential to the argument, for Hegel’s own exposition uses “literary” tropes as surely as it mirrors and amplifies those tropes in the structure of the *Phenomenology* as a whole. But Hegel maintains a certain tension between “Science” and narrative when he suggests the “journey” of the Soul which “seems not to be Science” but “the
path of the natural consciousness which presses forward to true knowledge” in forms constituted “as though they were the stations appointed for it by its own nature…” (Phenomenology 49). Iris Murdoch shows more clearly, if less richly, than Hegel the possibility of a kind of synthesis of the two modes, argument and narrative, in both her essays and fiction. Her essay “Against Dryness” criticizes she takes to be the tendency towards desiccated style in analytic philosophy, that philosophy needs the livening influence of literature to inspire a new “vocabulary of attention”: “It is here that literature is so important, especially since it has taken over some of the tasks formerly performed by philosophy. Through literature we can re-discover a sense of the density of our lives” (Murdoch 49). Accordingly, Murdoch’s fiction, The Philosopher’s Pupil, for example, embeds in narrative questions of the meaning of life and the use of philosophy as therapy.

Crucial to this study will be the application of the dual-aspect theory to literature. A problem with this literature, though, is, at least stereotypically, its lack of literariness: its emphasis on telling over showing, its reliance on formulas of plot and character, its “tendentiousness” in the Marxist or utopian-socialist senses. This critique is familiar enough but it is leveled in a rigorous way by Theodor Adorno in his critique of writers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Bertolt Brecht. This theory will help refine my initial sketch of a Hegelian theory of truth that is congenial both literature and philosophy—to the common structure of truth that they share.

VIII. Adorno’s Critique

Theodor Adorno develops a version of Hegelian aesthetics in which a sort of truth as contradiction plays a crucial role, although in doing so he will challenge just the kind of political texts that my study affirms as potentially ethically and politically salutary. The truth of art for
Adorno is not about a correct relationship to reality in the sense of adequation or its aesthetic equivalent verisimilitude. “Only,” Adorno insists, “what does not fit into this world is true” (Aesthetic Theory 59). Truth is rather a kind of negation of reality, a resistance to any correspondence to social reality that is characterized by “self-identity.” By contrast, avers Adorno,

Aesthetic identity seeks to aid the nonidentical, which in reality is repressed by reality’s compulsion to identity. Only by virtue of separation from empirical reality, which sanctions art to model the relation of the whole and the part according to the work’s own need, does the artwork achieve a heightened order of existence. Artworks are afterimages of empirical life insofar as they help the latter to what is denied them outside their own sphere and thereby free it from that to which they are condemned by reified external experience. (Aesthetic Theory 4)

Here Adorno recommends that we reject, even in the case of realism, the model that states art is mimetic of empirical reality. Art has an existence autonomous from social reality in the sense that it presents an imagined or fictive reality, and by that very autonomy avoids—even challenges—the reification that characterizes all social reality. Self-identity is the characteristic principle of reification, the hardening of process into stasis and the limitation of becoming. By this non-identity that opposes reification, art “is the social antithesis of society” (8). There is nothing random or arbitrary about art’s negation of social reality; it is a determinate negation, for the very reason it is a negation is because it is the “essence and image” of social reality: “except where art goes against its own nature and simply duplicates existence, its task vis-à-vis that which merely exists, is to be its essence and image” (“Reconciliation” 159). Essence and image are meant here in the Hegelian sense of realities to which a non-identical entity strives.
I want to invoke Adorno with care here, for the propositional value that I ascribe to art—specifically literature—Adorno would deny. With tendentious writers such as Sartre and Brecht in mind, he mocks “[w]hat is today called a ‘message’” (Aesthetic Theory 27). He refuses to locate the truth-value of art in propositional content and speaks instead of “the utopia of its form” in which “art bends under the burdensome weight of the empirical world from which, as art, it steps away” (105). The only “content” of which Adorno approves, in a characteristic paradox, is form: a propos of Kafka, Adorno writes that “form is the locus of social content” (230). Here Kafka’s form is apparently its lack of correspondence with the predictable course of social reality, e.g., in which guilt is granted self-evident moral justifications and employment contracts governed by broadly accepted expectations of boss and employee. Form demonstrates the content of a monadic autonomy from social reality—and that autonomy entails both a severing of the relations of mimesis or adequation as well as the propositions that could be adduced from these relations. He would likely find the claim for a propositional content of a work of literature to be a reduction to “message” (27); this claim would make Sartre’s mistake of the transposition “meanings” from philosophy to the stage. Adorno is not straightforward on this point about propositional content, for he does ascribe something like this content to the artwork, but only as a totality, not in the particular “facts” that the artwork ostensibly represents:

It utters no propositions; it only becomes a proposition when taken as a whole.

The element of untruth inherent, in Hegel’s view, in every particular proposition because nothing is wholly identical with what it is supposed to be in a particular proposition, is eliminated by art in that the work of art synthesizes the elements within it in such a way that no one part is stated by any other….A work of art
only becomes knowledge when taken as a totality, i.e. through all its mediations, not through its individual intentions. ("Reconciliation” 168)

Adorno admits a commensurability between the truth of art and the truth of philosophy, though he denies this commonality is about representing reality correctly. Art is true only to the extent that it coincides with “philosophical truth”: “The truth content of artworks is not what they mean but rather what decides whether the work in-itself is commensurable to philosophical interpretation and coincides—with regard to the idea, in any case—with the idea of philosophical truth” (130-31). I take philosophical truth here to mean dialectical truth, the truth of contradiction or non-identity between subject and object, or between the reified totality of society and the alternative, autonomous totality of the artwork.

That totality is not reducible, then, to a proposition or series of propositions that imitate empirical or moral facts. Adorno’s model of the “artwork” in Aesthetic Theory as well as the essays “Commitment” and “Reconciliation Under Duress” is apparently a non-mimetic, modernist kind of artwork. However, my reading of the radical novel is non-mimetic except in the sense of totality of which Adorno approves. I do not claim that my theory about the radical novel—which, as I have said above, is a genre constituted by proletarian and utopian novels—will be faithful to Adorno’s own dismissive remarks on these politically tendentious artworks. In his polemic against Lukács, Adorno refers to proletarian novels—more precisely (and the distinction is key) he appears to mean Soviet social realist texts—as “the imbecility of the boy-meets-tractor literature” (“Reconciliation” 172). Meanwhile, Adorno complains about “the social-democratic ideal of the personality expounded by heavily-bearded Naturalists of the ’nineties, who were out to have a good time. There is tenderness only in the coarsest demand: that no-one shall go hungry any more” (Minima Moralia 156). I want to take these two remarks,
one condemning proletarian literature and the other, obliquely, condemning the bourgeois utopias of Bellamy or Morris, as caveats together with Adorno’s doctrine that an artwork is propositional only as a totality. For the function of the radical novel in this dissertation will be to bring out the coarsest demand of the utopian novel and the most utopian dream of the proletarian novel, which, to anticipate, is not the metanarrative of proletarian triumph but the story of lumpenproletarian déclassement and the recognition premised on the contradiction between its position and that of the totality of bourgeois capitalist society. This story is an alternative totality in a utopian sense. Presently I will turn to the first attempts in American literature to imagine this totality: the dialectic of the utopian novel of the 1890s.

Whether or not Adorno would approve of my epistemology of the artwork is not finally the issue here; its coherence and consequences are what is at stake. Adorno’s doctrine of the propositional totality of the artwork helps us to imagine that, in a way strictly analogous to the way the narrative of a text forms a totality. A novel is at once a great proposition and a great story. And if genre, too, is a dialectic, genre indeed forms a proposition and a narrative. The following three chapters make up the dialectic—the proposition and narrative—of the radical novel.
Chapter 2. The Utopian Novel: Egalitarian Recognition

In the introduction I followed Marx and Engels in their conception of utopian socialism, since they coined the term and placed it in opposition to their own scientific socialism. On the basis of this conception, I was able to articulate the difference between utopian and Marxist socialism in a literary-critical sense. In the present chapter I want to characterize the genre of the utopian text, with special reference to the texts of the end of the nineteenth century in the United States. This generic account will then be articulated or set in a dialectic with the proletarian novel, a dialectic that culminates in the understanding of the entire tradition of socialist literature in America as the radical novel.

My argument in this chapter follows the development of the utopian genre from Anna Bowman Dodd’s satire *The Republic of the Future, Or, Socialism a Reality* to the *Aufhebung* of satire in the serious irony of William Dean Howells in his Altrurian Romances. The following chapter serves several functions. First, it demonstrates the Hegelian logic of genre. Second, it develops the previous chapters’ general theory of genre by offering a particular instance of that theory. I will show how that instance is in fact exemplary: that a utopia is a model of genre in general. I hope thereby to show the fruitfulness of both the theory of genre and the “concept” (which is at the same time a narrative) of utopia. Third, this chapter begins the dialectic of the radical novel with respect to both content and form. That dialectic is an argument about content: the development of the notion of egalitarian recognition, or the mutual respect for persons grounded in an equitable distribution of resources. Egalitarian recognition is a fusion of two approaches to justice, distribution and recognition. The dialectic is also an argument with respect to form: the form of the radical novel is dialectical in the sense of dialogue. The individual utopian text often takes an explicitly dialogical form, whether epistolary or Socratic dialogue.
The interactions between texts that form the utopian genre proper are similarly dialogical, an inquiry in which each text tries to overcome the shortcomings of its predecessors and interlocutors. These interactions will develop beyond the utopian genre proper into the proletarian novel and finally be unified in a single dialectic, or dialogue, called the radical novel. At the highest level of abstraction, however, the utopia—and the radical novel that consummates and subsumes it—will turn out to be exemplary of humanistic genre as such, the unity of the two major epistemological discourses into the human condition of modernity: the novel and philosophy.

The “subjects” of this generic dialectic are interlocutors at three levels: the characters interacting within the texts, the individual texts at play intertextually, and the genres themselves. No level of dialogue can be reduced to any other level; in the radical novel particulars (persons and texts) cannot be collapsed into general accounts (genres), nor general accounts reduced to particulars. This formal rule against reductionism has important ethical implications. A Marxist dialectical theory of genre subsumes particulars in the general and dissolves all into the economy “in the last instance.” Here the utopian-dialectical method and the theory of genre-as-dialectic go hand in hand. The utopian dialectic is a narrative free of the economic “base”; the generic narrative posits dialectic—a narrative evolved out of “men’s brains” (Engels)—all the way down. At the same time, it is a dialectic that shares with Marxism its attempt to transform material reality: only that attempt is mediated not merely through social struggle but through the transformation of men’s brains. The importance of egalitarian recognition as both the form and content of the utopian genre, where the utopian genre is exemplary of genre in general, is that it gives us a model penetrating both culture and economy of respect for persons and acknowledgement of their equality. A text and a person, therefore, are for a utopian dialectic
homologous, equal in dignity yet different, or, as Bakhtin says about the character in Dostoevsky’s novels, “a fully valid, autonomous carrier of [its] own individual word” (*Problems* 5). Yet the horizon of this Bakhtinian recognition is the same as the *Communist Manifesto*: the solidarity in which “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (41).

I. Utopia: A Dialectic *In Medias Res*

We need to begin with the question of classification if we are to find the essence of utopia, because the criterial properties of the twofold aspect theory, the account of the ideal society, and the proper use as essence are not sufficient to determine what count as utopia. For we must immediately face strange texts such as Laurence Gronlund’s *The Co-operative Commonwealth*, published 1884. On the one hand, Gronlund’s work is a treatise, not a romance or novel. It argues that “Socialism is no importation, but a *home-growth*, wherever found” (7, emphasis original). On the other hand, its argument for a homegrown socialism, though influenced by Marxism, resembles utopianism in its specification of the details of a post-revolutionary society, details that Marxism in general refused to offer. The vision of the co-operative commonwealth influenced the utopian writers such as Edward Bellamy and William Dean Howells of the following decade (Rideout 7).

A utopian dialectical theory of genre accepts a variety of forms. Its stipulation of both narrative and argument, as I shall show especially in my discussion of the nexus of literature and philosophy below, can accommodate even treatises. If we adopt the dual aspect theory of genre, it might be questioned whether we are homogenizing distinct textual forms. Indeed, this would seem to be the case if we believe certain utopian writers who collapse the distinction between treatise and romance. This distinction appears in the prefaces to Donnelly’s *The Golden Bottle*
and Henry Everett’s *The People’s Program*, two “romances” published in 1892. Everett’s romance begins with an astonishing dedication to the leaders of the two biggest—and competing—organizations of labor in the U.S.: “To T.V. Powderly and Samuel Gompers, The World’s greatest labor leaders, in token of admiration, this story is respectfully dedicated.” Everett’s story is meant to have the inspiring force of an alliance between the Knights of Labor, which welcomed all workers into its ranks, and the American Federation of Labor, which excluded “unskilled” labor, women, and African Americans (Brecher 43, 69). The dedication itself is a sort of “genre” that bridges between political alliance and romance. But the Preface proper, as the threshold between alliance and narrative, is where the generic line between “lecture platform and literature” is erased (v). Everett urges that these media “should be everywhere employed to rouse the people to the importance of united action, and to persuade them that they can vastly improve their opportunities and enjoyments in life” (v). The genre of utopia, often taken to be a rigidly defined, even calcified form by the 1890s, in contrast to the aesthetic innovations of form more obviously dedicated to art-for-art’s-sake, is by its very use value, its polemical function, placed in a relationship of functional equivalence with other genres. Everett’s romance opens onto the world, indeed, even the economy: “The author has decided to give to the cause of the workingmen in America one half of the profits of this story” (vi, emphasis original). Yet, significantly, the relationship between culture and economy here makes reading the agency of political transformation, another sign that *The People’s Program* meets the criterial property of superstructural emphasis with which Engels charged the utopians. The relevant criterion of “genre” here, shared by lecture platform and literature, appears not to be form but rhetorical force; perhaps only because of the historical fact that this rhetoric (and probably the profits) failed are we inclined to discount rhetoric as the respect in which we define
genre. The enduring importance of this criterion, however, is that it follows on the Gronlund-Bellamy or treatise-romance dialogue to develop a generic narrative that overspills formal boundaries. Rhetorical force cannot be an adequate criterion for the definition of genre, for rhetoric cannot overcome the subjectivism of its relationship to the individual reader. Not only is rhetorical force (and force of both kind and magnitude) an empirical question impossible to gauge in all but its most prominent manifestations (the standard examples of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *Looking Backward*, and *The Jungle*), it has a very narrow horizon that is in fact ruptured by the social hope of most of the texts we call utopian, which offer themselves to all of posterity, not just to the readers of their own historical moment. However, rhetoric is not irrelevant but essential to form. With its emphasis on consciousness, utopian socialism more than any other kind of text depends on the idea that ideas can transform the world. The rhetoric of utopia is not an empirical claim but a claim that can only be falsified by the impossible arrival of the end of history, when we stop reading utopias.

The rhetorical criterion of the definition of a utopia, the aspect of the text which is for the writer to “set his readers to thinking,” (Donnelly 4), inspires another challenge to generic boundaries in another preface, this time to Ignatius Donnelly’s *The Golden Bottle*, a romance of a dream in which the farmer Ephraim Benezet, facing foreclosure, is given a magical method of creating gold. In this case the generic challenge is the distinction between latent and manifest form. *The Golden Bottle*, Donnelly claims, is only apparently a romance, “intended to explain and defend, in the thin disguise of a story, some of the new ideas put forth by the People’s Party, and which concern, I sincerely believe, all the peoples of the civilized world” (3). It is therefore impossible, in the context of *The Golden Bottle*, “to draw the line where argument ends and romance begins” (4). And this rhetorical romance—rhetorical and formal heterogeneity
converging—is in this sense representative of the whole utopian genre, insofar as it shows how a
contest over concepts—the concept of equality, or how it is realized—takes the form of
narrative, the shape of lived experience. The root of the genre of utopian romance, then, is
twofold: in historical (narrative) experience and in conceptual treatments. This account
encourages the view of the twofold narratological/conceptual character of the genre, and
provides an instance of the dual-aspect theory of genre in action.

The dual-aspect view would seem to contradict the distinction between treatise and
romance, lecture and story, on which Donnelly and Everett rely. Yet this distinction is a
commonsense one that apprehension of their texts as unities will subvert. The dual-aspect view is
a kind of sublation of the difference between treatise and romance. Donnelly and Everett appear
to make rhetoric the third term unifying the two, but in fact rhetoric is secondary to structure, a
consequence of its complexity.

At the same time as we may accept the dual aspect theory as definitive of utopia and
indeed genre in general, the formal theory alone does not seem to have the specificity to describe
the essence of utopia. While the structure of utopia seems exemplary of genre in general, that is,
the general account of genre seems insufficient to describe the richness of utopia. When we
consider these examples that have been called utopias by Sargent and Pfaelzer, the romances
(The Golden Bottle and The People’s Program) that confess their status as treatises and the
treatises (The Co-operative Commonwealth) that contain the content of the romances, we must
go beyond the merely formal quality of the dual aspect theory and consider its content. Here it
should be acknowledged before going further that not all of the texts we will consider can be
classified as “utopian-socialist.” Indeed, many of them are hostile to socialism, and The Golden
Bottle and The People’s Program, influenced as they are by Populism, contain only traces of
Gronlund's vision. But I hope to show that these traces and this hostility are parts of what bind the entire genre together in an essential contest over the term equality. Equality is the *sine qua non* of utopia in the 1890s, definitive of the socialism of that era as well as the conservative reactions to socialism. Equality, I shall argue, is the starting point for a socialist theory of recognition, or, the key element to the process that shapes subjects and structures society.

II. Utopia and Equality: A Generic Dialectic

Equality, then, is the content that complements the dual-aspect form of utopia in order to determine an adequate definition. I shall define the utopia of the 1890s, then, as the form that instantiates most plainly the dual-aspect structure of genre while inquiring into the nature of equality. This preoccupation with equality I take as paradigmatic of the utopian genre in general, though often utopias are articulated in explicit opposition to equality (e.g., Ayn Rand’s *The Fountainhead*). All utopias of the 1890s shared in a claim, however various, to the signer without a fixed signified. There was, that is, no essential concept of equality that all utopias advocated. Equality was (and is) a kind of “nodal point” or “master-signifier,” a word that, as Slavoj Žižek construes it, “unifies a given field, constitutes its identity” (95). Žižek derives the Lacanian notion of master-signifier from Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s discussion in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*: “…the category of *point de capiton*…or master-signifier involves the notion of a particular element assuming a ‘universal’ structuring function within a certain discursive field—actually, whatever organization that field has is only the result of that function—without the particularity of the element *per se* predetermining such a function” (Laclau and Mouffe xi). The universal and unifying properties of the master-signifier enable it to give coherence to a genre. The master-signifier’s “particularity” does not matter in this process of coherence, since as a master-signifier it lacks a signified—that is, there is no inherent, agreed-
upon concept, such as some version of equality of opportunity or equality of access to resources, to which the word attaches. According to Žižek, the signifier is therefore “pure,” emptied of content (97). There seem to be problems with this view. Žižek relies, via Lacan, on a Saussurean concept of the sign, which is already emptied of content. The distinctiveness of this or that sign consists not in a positive content but in a difference from another sign. The “purity” of the master-signifier, then, can hardly consist in its exemption from having content. Impurity would be a more proper construal, given that the master-signifier contains so many contradictory contents. The master-signifier is a special case of an essentially contested concept and, as a specifically political one, contains the capacity for violence rather than purity: or, perhaps, in striving towards a certain purity or essence it is inclined towards violence. I mean here the violence of constraining the other to be the same as oneself, the basic dynamic of an imperial or colonial situation. In the conclusion to this chapter, I will consider this charge of the violence of sameness when it is levelled against utopian socialism. A key point to note in advance is that equality is not identity, though it is often misunderstood as such. As Laclau writes, “To say that two things are equal—i.e., equivalent to each other in some respects—presupposes that they are different from each other in some other respects (otherwise there would be no equality but identity)” (“Uses of Equality” 5). What, then, is equivalence? By equivalence Laclau means something like “being accorded the same practical value.” Thus he and Mouffe urge the “articulation” of “various democratic struggles against different forms of subordination” in common effort (Hegemony xviii). Two or more signifiers—two groups, two individuals—may be equivalent if they affirm one another’s projects. Equality, then, is a matter of mutual affirmation or recognition of another’s struggle.
Equivalence or equality is nothing inherent or essential to the members of a chain of equivalence. The function of the master-signifier in general, and hence the particular master-signifier equality, is to impose an illusory unity on the field of signification or the concepts involved in an essential contest. I can, however, accept the Laclau-Mouffe account of equivalence as mutual affirmation of projects while rejecting the notion that equivalence via master-signification is illusory or ideological. In fact, however, to say “illusory or ideological” shows an ambiguity in the Laclau-Mouffe account of representation, for in the name of a rejection of what they variously call “essentialism” and “foundationalism,” all systems of signification are ideological in the sense that they are unmoored from any intrinsic social reality.

The distinction between “subordination” on the one hand and “oppression” and “domination” on the other provides a striking example. Subordination does not become oppression until the subordinated subject acknowledges itself as such and launches into an antagonistic relationship to the oppressor; subordination in turn does not become domination until recognized as “illegitimate from the perspective, or in the judgment, of a social agent external to them” (153-54). It is not clear why the social agent experiencing domination is not in a fairly good position to say whether or not subordination is legitimate, but that is not the point I want to pursue here. Rather, I want to observe the inevitability of some kind of “essentialism,” some ascription of an intrinsic nature of reality not contingent on the perspective or judgment of a social agent, an inevitability to which Laclau and Mouffe attest. For while they do lip service to a model (ideology?) of symbolization “all the way down,” in fact they acknowledge the “real” when they reach a relationship of subordination. If oppression and domination are actualized only if acknowledged as such, subordination is the “real” that is not contingent on anyone’s acknowledgement. Laclau and Mouffe, then, inadvertently or deliberately, are more faithful to
Lacan than to Derrida in acknowledging that there is indeed an “essence” to social conflict—and they call that essence subordination.

Because they want to overcome “economism” (the reduction of all social conflicts to economics and hence the privileging of economic struggle over, e.g., feminist, anti-racist, and queer struggles), and because an anti-essentialist poststructuralist model of language proves most congenial to a coalitional model of politics as well as the postmodern zeitgeist, Laclau and Mouffe confer the status of “ideology” on all signification, whether that ideology is conservative or progressive, right or left. They reject the necessary connection between the interests of workers and the ideology of socialism (Hegemony 83-85). Significantly, they do not explicitly reject the connection between the interests of African Americans and the ideology of anti-racism, or between the interests of women and the ideology of feminism, but their anti-essentialism entails such repudiations.

I press this point against Laclau and Mouffe because the preservation of what they call essentialism and the rejection of the ubiquity of ideology are crucial to a theory of recognition. This does not commit me to the absolutely unfashionable, and therefore untenable, metaphysical proposition of an intrinsic human nature, although I will need to postpone my discussion of the difference between the falsity of ideology and the truth of recognition for the following chapter. As a preliminary stopgap remark I want to say that without such a difference one is left with a merely arbitrary choice in favor of recognition over ideology; one is not guided by any criterion; for instance, the elitism of the Nietzschean “overman” and the egalitarianism of the class-conscious worker are equally ideological. But choice itself has been radically undermined by the poststructuralist dissolution of the subject.
III. Equality of What?

The first question regarding the concept of equality is, as Amartya Sen observes, “Equality of What?” I will not consider the various “whats” examined in Sen’s lecture of that title but focus on two types of equality (by no means the only ones) debated in the 1890s utopia: equality of resources and equality of dignity or respect.

What is equality of resources? On this point Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* is exemplary: it is equality of income. Everyone under the “Nationalist” (Bellamy’s euphemism for state-socialist) regime receives an annual allotment of equal credit. It is irrelevant whether Bellamy’s concept of equality of resources is coherent as it stands. It does not, for example, face the problem that “expensive tastes,” disabilities, etc., will cost an individual more and thus lead to inequality of resources. The reason for bringing up this problem is to set up the important objection, below, that Bellamy presupposes a certain homogeneity in his egalitarianism: everyone has the same cost of living, and thus can live the egalitarian life by means of equal credit. By contrast, William Dean Howells in his Altruria trilogy is advisedly vague: equality of resources consists in resources shared and thus potentially available on an equal basis to all. The point, however, is not whether the utopian socialists had a rigorous concept of equality of resources but whether, in their nascent understanding of the concept, they laid the groundwork for further investigation. A utopian-socialist equality of resources is a dialectic, not a coherent conclusion.

But equality of resources rests on a different equality-of-what: human dignity, the basis of respect. The presupposition of the utopian novel, whether conservative or progressive, is the equality of human dignity. Humans as humans are equally deserving of respect. In *Looking Backward*, Julian West questions Dr. Leete as to the distribution of credit, which is equivalent
for all individuals: “By what title does the individual claim his particular share?” Leete answers that “His title…is his humanity. The basis of his claim is the fact that he is a man” (74). Two related observations are important here. The first is that humanity is the “basis” or grounds on which an individual can claim equal credit. The second is that humanity is not merely an empirical description but an affirmation or acknowledgement of worth. Thus the basis of equal shares is equal worth; put differently, equal recognition justifies equal distribution.

Dignity is a kind of concept that mediates between prestige and personhood, between distinction and universality. Indeed, we use dignity both as an egalitarian and a recognitive concept; we affirm the dignity of humans as humans; we also affirm the dignity of a marginalized or oppressed social group in spite of that marginalization or oppression. If, then, dignity could be called the stuff of both egalitarianism and recognition, this presupposition is the kernel of egalitarian recognition. A specifically socialist form of recognition is nascent in Bellamy’s egalitarianism.

*Looking Backward* is often thought to have begun the genre of utopia in the late nineteenth century, although below I will give reason to doubt that, mainly on grounds that any bibliographical beginning is as arbitrary as the beginning of a decade. *Looking Backward* in any case not the last word on equality and recognition. Alvarado Fuller’s *A.D. 2000* is structured around the desire for equality of opportunity that makes possible a recognition of esteem. A military officer, dissatisfied with his relatively low rank, puts himself through a long hibernation from which he awakes with enough years under his belt to deserve a promotion on the basis of a very lengthy stint in the service. One might doubt the merit of such quiescent service, but the presupposition on which it is based is the special acknowledgement that those with a certain level of gumption and ingenuity deserve.
It might be objected that the notion of “equal recognition” is incoherent, since the concept “recognition” is meant to bring out the particularity of the individual rather than one’s homogeneity with the rest of humanity. There is a dialectic here, however, between the two forms of equality, such that, if equal recognition of humanity grounds equal distribution of resources, equal distribution of resources is in turn a precondition for a higher-level recognition of the particular achievements of the individual. For example, Dr. Leete relates that some jobs are the basis of a recognition with respect to achievement. The “administration would only need to take [a difficult and dangerous job] out of the common order of occupations by declaring it ‘extra hazardous,’ and those who pursued it especially worthy of the national gratitude, to be overrun with volunteers. Our young men are very greedy of honor, and do not let slip such opportunities” (Looking 62). Thus we have three forms of acknowledgement: recognition with respect to humanity, equal distribution on the basis of that recognition, and recognition with respect to individual achievement. The latter is a limited notion of recognition for a number of reasons. It remains contrary to the usual sense of the word “recognition,” which relates to identity, whether individual identity or identity with respect to some social group such as race or sexuality. As such, it seems to ignore—though not in principle exclude—these forms of difference. On a related note, according to Iris Marion Young’s concept of the “politics of difference,” the stake of recognition is not merely individual identity, which would, as she charges the “distributive paradigm” does, entail a “social atomism”; the stake of recognition is also relations between persons (Young 245-46). If Bellamy’s egalitarian recognition seems inconsistent with a proper sense of recognition, it also appears inconsistent with a proper sense of egalitarianism. Its premise is equal humanity, but its upshot is a meritocratic, invidious system of honor; therefore it is inconsistent with a full-fledged egalitarianism suggested by William Dean
Howells in *A Traveller from Altruria*. The Altrurian Mr. Homos, attempting to piece together inconsistent American attitudes toward equality, offers to American Mr. Twelvemough the observation “that while all honest work is honored among you, there are some kinds of honest work that are not honored so much as others” (15). Servers no less than ministers or lawyers (the latter two are members of Homos’s “little group” of interlocutors) ought to be honored as on par with one another.

It might be objected before going further that there is no dignity with respect to being human in the utopian novel but only dignity with respect to being American. The fruitful ambiguity of the concept of horizon can elucidate this problem. On the one hand, horizon can denote the limitation of one’s historical consciousness, the point beyond which we cannot see. On the other hand, horizon for Hans-Georg Gadamer suggests also the transcendence of a limit: what is beyond the horizon: “to have a horizon’ means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it,” and “[t]o acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand—not in order to look away from it but to see it better…” (301, 304). In the abstract, at least, the horizon is at once ever-receding and in principle limitless.

In terms of horizon as limit, the horizon of the utopians was indeed “America” or the U.S.; in terms of horizon as always beyond a limit, the horizon of the utopians was humanity itself, where “humanity” is not suppressive of difference but takes into account a postcolonial and, more broadly, an intersectionality critique, to be articulated below. The ambiguity of Americanness and humanness appears acutely in William Dean Howells’s Altrurian romances. The portrait of Altruria oscillates between identity with America (its history, its dominant religion of Christianity, its egalitarian spirit, its invidious practices) and radical difference (the transcendence of history, the actual practice of “early” or socialist Christianity, the enactment of
equality). Altruria and America, so Mr. Homos claims, are really “one at heart” (23), and in this vision of the two nations all of humanity seems subsumed into America, or else America and Altruria are both subsumed into humanity.

IV. The Republic of the Future

The traditional starting point for the late-nineteenth century utopia is Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1888). But if we try plunging into the generic river a year before, we find Anna Bowman Dodd’s *The Republic of the Future*, a text whose roiling ideology will be pacified to a glassy surface in *Looking Backward*. Although a claim to an absolute beginning in *The Republic of the Future* would be arbitrary, the claim that it contains the kernel of ideological conflict in the 1890s is demonstrable. The mode of *The Republic* is epistolary, dialogical. In letters home to a friend in free-market Sweden, the traveler Wolfgang observes the aporetic development of socialism in America.

In the New York Socialistic City, writes Wolfgang, conformity and homogeneity exclude the “beautiful, […] the lovely, or the rare” (22). Far from the prominent public architecture one would expect from a socialist regime, bourgeois residences make up the city: “miles and miles of a city composed of little two-story houses as like one unto another as two brown nuts” (19). And these residences house “the most deadening uniformity” (21). The society is “the very acme of dreariness” (20). In the socialist republic, enjoyment is absent (22). The citizens “have the look of people who have come to the end of things and who have failed to find it amusing” (23). Socialism is a drab apocalypse. Through Wolfgang’s observations of uniform apparel and the transformation of homemade pies into mass-produced “pellets,” Dodd predicts and satirizes the stultifying effect that socialism would have on individual and cultural or aesthetic expression. Feminist progress epitomizes the end of enjoyment. Society abolishes home cooking, the
traditional province of “woman”: “When the last pie was made into the first pellet, woman’s true freedom began” (31).

Wolfgang clearly ironizes this anhedonic state, but the extent to which his irony succeeds in unequivocally condemning the Socialistic City is not clear. Wolfgang’s relationship to America, and the extent to which he is or is not a spokesperson for the text itself, are complex questions. He seems skeptical of a central principle of American ideology, “by the people for the People”: “Everything here, from the laying out of the city to the last detail concerning the affairs of commerce or trade, is arranged according to the socialistic principle—by the people for the People” (20). The discrepancy in capitalization here—by the people for the People—is not found in the text of the Gettysburg Address itself. The second, capitalized “People” elevates the first, generic term beyond some merely empirical aggregate to a collective agent, as if the process of government by the people effected this constitution of People. And this agent of history resembles the one realized under Marxian socialism. Thus a phrase from the Gettysburg Address, which asserted the strength of the union of the United States at a moment of unprecedented weakness, becomes a nascent statement of socialism. Wolfgang is skeptical of American democracy, while Dodd’s readers would be sympathetic. But, wittingly or not, he challenges the readers to follow out the logical consequence of Lincoln’s phrase: the Gettysburg Address, aimed to heal the breach between two nations, is in another context invoked to explain how another, class-based breach may be healed: for better or for worse, via socialism. Political democracy implies economic democracy. Wolfgang suggests that democracy is fatal to capitalism, or, conversely, capitalism is fatal to democracy: but to the extent that the reader affirms democracy, she or he should also affirm socialism. Thus Wolfgang aims his criticism at socialism but misses the mark, indicting capitalism instead.
Writing just after the mass strike of May 1886 and the Haymarket Affair, in an atmosphere of much middle-class anxiety about class resentment (Brecher 46-68), Dodd looks past the immediate exigency of a shorter workday to note the root cause of discontent: “enormous accumulation of fortunes in a few hands” that gave rise to “envy and anger of the foreign poorer classes” (53). Dodd makes her affirmation of equality almost inadvertently, simply by reporting on the negative consequences of wealth inequality, thus avoiding a controversial and tendentious assertion of the justice of equality. And, though the ideal of equality (albeit contested in definition and implementation) was the *sine qua non* of Bellamy’s vision, Dodd would find herself in the company of other ostensibly utopians, such as the moderate John Bachelder and the conservative Alvarado Fuller, disturbed by the vast inequality of the Gilded Age. However harshly narrator Wolfgang assesses the means of socialism, the end of socialism, a solidarity of wealth, is ethically justified by its consequences.

Contrary to the expected tendentious tone of a monological satire of socialism, Dodd’s words are ambiguous; if this ambiguity is wise, then for American liberals in the decades following the Civil War, the socialistic principle must be an ethical imperative of the American system, whether acknowledged or disavowed. *The Republic of the Future* warns against the destruction of the American system, finding seeds of that destruction not in “the foreign poorer classes” but in the core principle of the system itself (53). Indeed, economic democracy seems to be the only remaining application of the American principle in the New York City of the future, for under socialism “politics…has ceased to exist” (69). Therefore there is “no such thing known as political strife, or bribery or corruption” (70). Wolfgang does not comment on the danger of the end of dissent, just mentions some of its benefits. This end entails a further ambiguity, one that sends us back to Gettysburg’s political principle. If there is any resolution to Dodd’s
ambiguity, it is democracy in the fullest sense, political as well as economic. By the people for the People: the former is the aggregate of individuals recognized by the state; the latter is the unity constituting the state; in this grammatical rapprochement is the utopian kernel of an ideological conflict, and rational resolution between recognition and equality.

Before Wolfgang’s eyes, the republic of the future appears under its dystopian aspect, its commitment to politics entailing a failure of aesthetics. Dodd discerns, then, a contradiction between aesthetics and ethics or politics in an egalitarian project. These ambiguities—between dystopia and utopia, and, within utopia, between ethics and aesthetics—are intrinsic to the utopian project. Robert C. Elliott argues that utopian and satirical discourse are two sides of the same coin; in ancient Greek satire, for instance, “there is inevitable doubleness of effect—longing as well as laughter” (6). But it is from the medieval festival of the carnival that the two discourses come, because “both derive from the sanctioned license of the holiday” (14). Satire incorporates both a “negative” critical component and a “positive” “norm” or “standard of excellence,” and utopia also “wears a Janus-face”: “it establishes a standard, a goal; and by virtue of its existence alone it casts a critical light on society as presently constituted” (18). Elliott notes, however, that the two components or faces are sometimes explicitly distinguished, as in Looking Backward and More’s Utopia itself. Dodd’s Republic lays bare the structure of utopia itself by (a) foregrounding its satire, (b) incorporating a covert utopian affirmation, and (c) developing the contradiction between (a) and (b). Dodd thus lays bare the constitutive contradiction of utopia—the danger and promise of perfection—and showing that contradiction to lie, at least in part, in the contradiction between aesthetics and politics. Utopia as socialism worked to repress, but ultimately to sublate, this contradiction.
It will be necessary at this point to take stock of the contradictions with which we have been dealing. The first contradiction is that between equality and recognition. The second is between ethics and aesthetics. There is a tight linkage between the two contradictions, though, because both concern the nature of equality. The aesthetic problem with socialism, so Dodd’s story argues, is its commitment to equality, since equality leads to homogeneity of individuals. Yet in this homogeneity equality turns out not merely to undermine aesthetics but ethics as well, insofar as the process of recognition, the affirmation of the special qualities of each individual, is simultaneously an aesthetic and ethical process. Equality under socialism, implies Dodd, is fatal to both ethics and aesthetics and thus values as such. Yet socialism is the very principle of the national union! The ambiguities of Dodd’s story show the exigence of reconciling the contradictions of equality: equality and recognition, ethics and aesthetics.

As a satirical utopia, *The Republic of the Future* gives arguments for and against socialism. The argument in favor is the preservation of the union; the argument against is the loss of value (aesthetic and ethical) as such. Both Bellamy and Bachelder, from putatively opposite ends of the ideological spectrum, contend that ethics and aesthetics are one, and that both of these dimensions of value militate in favor of their respective political-economic position. But the truth of utopian discourse is found in satire, and the truth of satire is contradiction or paradox. The utopian novel sets up a contradiction between aesthetics and politics. From the beginning of the 1890s we see a conflict between the two that will be the bane of literary radicalism throughout its existence, the first half of the twentieth century. This contradiction is both the content and the form of literary radicalism. As content, it is the demand to level hierarchies and smooth out the peculiarities, the inferiorities and superiorities, of character that are constitutive of the quintessentially “bourgeois” genre the *Bildungsroman*. The novel of education concerns
self-fashioning: the content concerns invidious aesthetic distinctions, the central character being the one most aesthetically distinguished. This applies even in the case of Carrie Madenda, whose encounter with the aesthete Dalton Ames in Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* at once shows her cultural philistinism and her refined kind of longing, in the final rocking chair scene, to overcome that coarseness. A “properly” utopian novel like *Herland* features ciphers, stereotypical registers of a strange other society, which is itself populated by homogeneous bodies: the strange otherness is a quality not of individuals but of the body politic. Accordingly, the cancellation of aesthetic individuality in the utopian novel blurs into the aesthetically homogeneous form of the utopian novel. It is standardized, preferring parity of dialogue, the template of traveler and guide, this society and that.

Such indistinction contrasts with the disjointed structure of a novel such as *The Sound and the Fury*, aesthetically superior in part because of its structural singularity (no less than the uniqueness of each of its narrators). Does the acknowledgement of difference in structure between the utopian and modernist novel not undermine my dual-aspect theory of literary structure? Here I want to emphasize that the dual-aspect theory is a deep structure in comparison to the blatant, disordered cacophony of a Faulkner. In fact, the twofold structure is part of what lends coherence to Faulkner’s fragmented emplotment and point of view relativized to the uneducated, the mad, the idiotic.

The aesthetic monotony of what by the end of this study I will call the radical novel (utopian and proletarian novels, what I call “lumpenproletarian novels” and some so-called “bourgeois” novels as well) is, whatever else it may be, a constant reminder of the threat of homogeneity, the end of politics, the stultification of aesthetics and the intellect, and the undermining of the very possibility of recognition. For laying bare the structure of genre is at the
same time to put literature under an impossible strain, expecting it to do philosophy and tell story at once, and to tell the truth of the dialectic between them. The radical novel exposes the truth of genre, the truth of society, as surely as it shows the falsity of art. It is therefore semblance in the eyes of society and bad art in the eyes of aesthetes.

In the background is the city of Christiania in the home country of Sweden, of which Wolfgang declares “We are still chaotic, and unformed, and unredeemed, and unregenerate. But we are tremendously alive” (85). It remains in a state of nature, prior to the social contract, like the fish that refuse the “reformatory discipline” of vegetarianism and persist in cannibalism (11). Yet readers do not see what life is, only glimpses of nature through the windows of the subatlantic “pneumatic tubes” that connect Sweden to America (8). What to make of the strange place Christiania, which is both unredeemed and dedicated to religion? Significantly, we never see what life is like; it is only defined negatively, as what socialism is not. Life is essentially violent, chaotic, disorganized, and lost. Sweden is neither religious nor heathen but both. If, generically, The Republic is a “utopia,” the true utopia within the text is not “New York Socialistic City” but Christiania, Sweden. America or New York is a euchronia, or another time, while Christiania is a utopia, another place. Further, Christiania is the true “no-place”: we get no information about it, and Hannevig, Wolfgang’s epistolary interlocutor, does not respond. The true utopia in Dodd, then, is not the republic of the future but the chaotic old world. Even though Europe is rebaptized, it cannot be made anew; history is irreversible and socialism the grim future. But if utopia means both no-place and happy place, neither Christiania nor America is the happy place. Although in America religion has been “voted immoral” (81), an “Ethical Temple” has been erected in its place, and it is ultimately America, not Christiania, that is organized by
Jewish faith,\footnote{The conflation “Judeo-Christian” ethics would not do justice to the anti-Semitism of Nietzsche’s remarks. Christianity appears to be the nemesis to the noble classical ideal only insofar as it is a continuation of the legacy of “the Jews,…[who] were the priestly, rancorous nation \emph{par excellence}, though possessed of an unequaled ethical genius” (186). Jewish resentment antagonizes classical strength and nobility throughout history, reappearing in the Reformation and in the French Revolution. Nietzsche cheers Napoleon as the classical aristocratic ideal making a comeback.} which for Nietzsche was the religious ancestor of socialism (Dodd 82, Nietzsche \textit{Genealogy} 185-87).

Dodd could not have read Nietzsche’s \textit{Genealogy of Morals} before writing \textit{The Republic of the Future}, since it, too, appeared in 1887. Like Dodd, Nietzsche acknowledged the futility of an ethical critique of socialism, for socialism inherited ethical discourse, with its fundamental binary opposition of good and evil, from Jewish discourse (\textit{Genealogy} 166-68). As Hegel understood and Nietzsche echoed in his \textit{Genealogy of Morals}, the ethical life of the ancient Greeks or Romans, for which each was respectively nostalgic, was now irrecoverable. In \textit{Republic of the Future} one might expect primarily an ethical critique of the socialistic city, but an aesthetic critique is foregrounded, just as in Plato’s \textit{Republic} communism is rejected as the “city of the pigs,” and the coarse “relishes” of the commoners adopted instead. If Plato’s attitude towards the Socratic republic is ambiguous, so is Dodd’s attitude to her republic. The writers concur that a certain degree of aesthetic asceticism is necessary to secure the good society. Put with all the crassness and anti-Semitism as Nietzsche puts it, the great struggle in the genealogy of morals concerned the fight between egalitarian, Judaic ethics and invidious, Roman aesthetics.
Dodd places the responsibility for her “slave revolt in morals” not, as Nietzsche did, in Jewish conspiracy but in Christian ethics. If Dodd aims at an ethical critique of socialism and finds it ethically justified but only aesthetically wanting, then her ideology turns into its opposite, her apparently Christian preoccupation becoming an affirmation of Nietzschean aesthetics. To be sure, *The Republic of the Future* is an attempt at an ethical critique; however, it accomplishes precisely the opposite, a repudiation of ethics. A conservative critique becomes a progressive affirmation, and the stage is set for a decade of appraising contests over the nature and value of a Bellamian utopia.

*The Republic of the Future* has a satirical and dystopian aspect, representing what Jean Pfaelzer calls “a society inferior to the reader’s own” (80). Here I do not mean to conflate satire and dystopia, but it happens that in some cases, like Dodd’s, a satirical utopia turns out to be a dystopia. Significantly, however, “New York Socialistic City” is not explicitly compared to any society except in the brief mention of Sweden in which the narrator declares, with some apparent satisfaction, that it is still “chaotic” and “unredeemed.” The implied comparison is rather to the American society of Dodd’s day, with its fears of immigrants and anarchists (“The anarchists, you remember, were foreigners, chiefly Germans, Irishmen and a few Russians” [50]). Granted, these are constituents of society that Wolfgang considers heterogeneous with the U.S. in a proper sense, but they nonetheless constitute the People. Relative to Sweden—and to a contemporary America racked by class conflict—New York City appears civilized. Yet Pfaelzer provides three reasons why one should read a text like *Republic* as dystopian: “In the nineteenth-century American dystopias we recognize intention first through the perspective of the narrator; second, through the author’s ironic stance toward a society inferior to the reader’s own; and third, through parody, the exaggeration and reversal of the structures of a closely related genre” (80).
However, *The Republic* gives the reader a curmudgeonly, complacent narrator; its irony alternates with grudging appreciation (the allusion to the Gettysburg Address cannot but contain this ambiguity), and its genre is not distinct from the utopian tradition, which, as Fredric Jameson shows even of its founding text, Thomas More’s *Utopia*, is fundamentally ideologically ambiguous.\(^{13}\) Robert Elliott holds that there are always “positive” and “negative” elements, affirmative visions of the ideal and criticisms of existing society on the basis of that ideal, in both utopia and satire; what distinguishes the two genres is the difference of emphasis each places on these elements (Elliott 18). There is for Elliott a negative element in all utopias; conversely, one might extend his point to assert that there is a positive element in all dystopias like Dodd’s *Republic*.

Thus, despite the stereotype of monological, “tendentious” novels, Mikhail Bakhtin’s doctrine of the dialogism of language still applies here. At this juncture, the aesthetic condemnation of tendentious novels as ideologically monolithic needs to be reassessed. On Bakhtin’s account, every utterance is permeated with and inspires other utterances. Even a tendentious assertion—perhaps especially a tendentious assertion—is

\[
\text{directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer,}
\]
\[
\text{anticipates it and structures itself in the answer’s direction. Forming itself in an}
\]
\[
\text{atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that}
\]
\[
\text{which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the}
\]
\[
\text{answering word. Such is the situation in any living dialogue. (Dialogic}
\]
\[
\text{Imagination 280)}
\]

\(^{13}\) See chapter three of Jameson’s *Archaeologies*. 
It might even be argued that in Dodd’s utopia the monologue is the liveliest of dialogues. Bakhtin’s position that every instance of a word—and particularly ideological words—contain contested allusions to others’ words suggests that every utopian word is both an affirmation of and mockery of utopianism. Hannevig’s silence neither agrees nor disagrees with Wolfgang’s loquacity; rather the interlocutor watches the narrator tie himself into rhetorical knots and leaves the reader to do the cinching or the untying. The reader occupies the place of the silent Hannevig. As Wolfgang Iser says of Smollett’s epistolary novel *Humphry Clinker*, “since none of the addressees writes in return, the reader must take their place” (Iser 71).

**Bakhtin makes this dialogism sound obvious:**

> Indeed, any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist—or, on the contrary, by the “light” of alien words that have already been spoken about it. It is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents. The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile. (276)

Yet the obviousness of dialogism is hidden outside of a passage like that of the Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov* or the ideological strain within Raskolnikov’s own head. A tension exists here in Bakhtin’s position. On the one hand, he calls certain texts explicitly monological.
But there is something inevitable about dialogism in any text: language is inherently double (triple, quadruple, etc.) voiced. This openness to dispute is not only intrinsic to Wolfgang’s tendentiousness; it is implicit in recipient Hannevig’s muteness.

If the “object,” or the referent, of the word is the subject of contest, it seems that the conventional difference between denotation and connotation does not hold. Rather, in Cleanth Brooks’s construal of the “language of paradox,” or poetry, “the poet does not use a notation at all—as the scientist may properly be said to do” (9). Language operates free of the object, not referring to the object, nor in the circular, poststructuralist dynamic of referring only to other signifiers, but fundamentally being asserted, denied, scrutinized, and contested by other subjects, subjects that do not form a subject of history, a People, yet that are too entangled with one another to simply remain a people. Despite Bakhtin’s explicit reservations about utopian discourse, this obscuring of the object in a tangle of other words is how a utopian dialectic works: oriented towards past and future and relatively free of the object (of history) itself. A virtue of the satirical utopia (to which a book like Mikhail Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita* may be compared) is that it lays bare the condition of contest. While *Looking Backward* suppresses this contest in the complacency of Dr. Leete and the compliance of Julian West, *Republic* puts its incoherence on display.

---

14 For poststructuralism, e.g. Lacan’s theory of the subject, the subject would simply be reduced to signifier. Perhaps this reduction involves some excess of the “Real” of desire; for Bakhtin this excess would not be a “surplus” or a “remainder” but a plenitude central to and constitutive of the subject.
V. Equality and Looking Backward

While equality in various senses is the principle woven into every aspect of Nationalist society in Looking Backward, Equality radicalizes this “democratic idea”: “all human beings are peers in rights and dignity” (18). Such a tenet is not necessarily radical, but it has feminist consequences in this sequel to Looking Backward. The didactic role of Dr. Leete in Looking Backward has been partially supplanted by Edith’s own Socratic strategy. “You are a merciless cross-examiner,” Julian protests to Edith, and to her father he marvels: “Your daughter…has been proving herself a mistress of the Socratic method. Under a plausible pretext of gross ignorance, she has been asking me a series of easy questions, with the result that I see as I never imagined it before the colossal sham of our pretended popular government in America” (14). Edith as representative woman represents a democratic ideal against which nineteenth-century inequalities, patriarchal and economic, are judged.

In Equality Bellamy answers the “aesthetic objection to economic equality,” the claim, which resembles Dodd’s thesis, that “the picturesqueness and amusement of the human spectacle would suffer without the contrast of conditions between the rich and poor” (392). Significantly, Dr. Leete dismisses this objection as “quite a fine ladies’ argument,” based on the privilege of the idle, and replies to the aesthetic objection with an ethical riposte, that it is both “brutal” and “stupid”: brutal because it relies on a cruelly invidious distinction between spectators and sufferers of inequality, and stupid because it overlooks the fact most people are happy witnessing others’ happiness rather than unhappiness (393). Granted, Dr. Leete has just answered the more ethical charge that “economic equality would really tend to make people monotonously alike, tediously similar, not merely as to bank accounts, but as to qualities in general, with the result of obscuring the differences in natural endowments, the interaction of which lends all the zest to
social intercourse” (391). In response, Dr. Leete maintains that equality, by leveling social conditions, is a more effective “man-measuring system” for determining inequality of natural endowments (392). In fact this response is more effective as an answer to the aesthetic objection, since what is at stake is the self-fashioning of “men.” The significance of this confusion of question and answer, ethics and aesthetics, is that Equality is premised on the indistinguishability of the two domains of thought—in fact on the homogeneity of thought.

Dr. Leete would protest heartily against this charge, for his system is based on “higher education for all” (246). A “universality of culture” (247) is responsible for the solution to many social ills. Indeed, the “general, necessary, and fundamental cause” of socialist revolution was “the growth of intelligence and diffusion of knowledge among the masses from the sixteenth to the end of the nineteenth centuries” (305). Yet the ambiguity of “universality of culture” here its connotation of both broadly shared individual cultivation and broadly shared uniformity; Julian’s visit to the classroom is to witness a “recitation” (212), an apparently rehearsed display of the students’ knowledge of political economy.

As Pfaelzer explains, whatever its innovations of content, Bellamy’s book employs traditional utopian forms: “As is so often true of utopian apologues, Bellamy divides his personal version of socialism between two narrative modes, the fable and the manifesto. And as so often happens, the fable follows the standard romance tradition. Conventionally enough, it begins with a ‘happy accident’ which makes a break in Julian’s consciousness….” (Pfaelzer 29). It might be objected that talk of a “division” of modes makes little sense if such division, and subsequent mixing, constitute a common form. In any case, however, Pfaelzer’s point serves to establish that the book of the future is by no means an aesthetic innovation commensurate with its radical content. Bellamy therefore fails to develop the aesthetics of Looking Backward in a way that
would refute Dodd’s critique of the anti-aesthetic aspect of socialism; in fact, the aesthetic monotony of this dialogue only confirms Dodd’s complaint. The most telling sign, then, that Bellamy is working with a recalcitrant antinomy between the aesthetics and politics of socialism is not at the level of content but at the level of the form of his texts themselves. The leveling within the society represented produces an aesthetic indistinction at the level of form. If the radicalizing progress from *Looking Backward* to *Equality* is any indication, the radicalizing of the principle of equality in its various manifestations involves a decrease in aesthetic merit. *Equality* eliminates the narrative suspense of *Looking Backward* in favor of a plodding and significantly longer dialogue. Edith’s increased social status, her mental and physical equality with the men of society, seems, far from an inspiration to fresh radicalism, a condition for the aesthetic doldrums of the book. The conventional love plot, as the only source of narrative tension in *Looking Backward* is absent.\(^{15}\) Thus for Bellamy the only imaginable source of narrative tension, of aesthetically compelling form, is a source of gender inequity rather than a release from it. To be sure, the self-consciously Socratic structure of the book (much dialogue, scant diegesis) is intended both to supply the aesthetic tension and to promote Edith to an equal position. The latter goal is accomplished precisely through her apparent naïveté. Not only does *Equality* fail in its claim to the aesthetic superiority of socialism over capitalism, it also suggests a certain formal conservatism that casts about for past aesthetic resources from Plato to Dickens to Marx: and the repetitions of these forms are only conservative.

\(^{15}\) In discussion at the 2014 Conference of the Society for Utopian Studies, Lyman Tower Sargent pointed out to me the increase in Edith Leete’s powers from *Looking Backward* to *Equality.*
But the central contradiction at hand does not seem to be the tension between aesthetics and politics of utopian-socialist writing but between competing definitions of equality. The relationship between these two contradictions, however, is the following. The meaning of equality is contested. Yet, as W.B. Gallie would say, this contest cannot be resolved by consulting a good dictionary, but of appraising the “right” meaning, which is indistinguishable from taking a certain practical stance. “Equality” is an affirmation of value, not a purely empirical description. A crucial test of this affirmation is whether value in its fullest sense—both ethical and aesthetic value—can be coherently ascribed to equality defined in a given way. The standard for a correct definition of utopian equality is that it be coherent and practically viable. That is, only if aesthetics and politics form a coherent whole can a given definition of equality—the utopian-socialist definition of equality, or egalitarian recognition—be appropriated practically and appraised as the right one.

The relationship between form or aesthetics and content or ethics in Bellamy is incoherent in both Looking Backward and Equality; according to this relationship, one’s aesthetic value may undermine its ethical value, and vice-versa. However, Bellamy’s more conservative critic, the moderate John Bachelder, effects a reconciliation of aesthetics and ethics, form and content, and, I now suggest, narrative and propositional truth, because he conveys ideas primarily through narrative, avoiding the stultifying aesthetic effects of dialogue as well as the need in that form to unify narrative and propositional truth, to force the story to carry the truth of statements.

VI. A.D. 2050

If utopian form in the 1890s draws on a bricolage of manifesto, fable, and dialogue, and Everett and Donnelly seem to confess a latent identity of the three, John Bachelder preserves the
aesthetic integrity as well as the epistemological consistency of his text. The contest concerns the master-signifier of equality. But it turns out that the master-signifier, as itself a trope, is formal as well: the crucial dialogical element that unites narrative and propositional truth in lieu of dialogue.

In his preface to *A.D. 2050: Electrical Development at Atlantis* (1890) Bachelder criticizes *Looking Backward* for eliding crucial details of the society of the future: “Mr. West, had but faintly sketched, or not thoroughly investigated, the situation” (3). Though Julian West hears from the “silver-tongued advocate, Dr. Leete, the co-operative or communistic boomer of his day,” that all are satisfied under the Nationalist regime, in fact the “gaseous volcanic elements were rapidly accumulating” under the surface (3, 4). The intellectuals resent the labor imposed on them, and the injustice that the “indolent tramp and beggar” receive the same pay (5). Bachelder seems deliberately to ignore or else to miss Bellamy’s crucial requirement that all citizens up to a certain age must be a part of the Industrial Army, and those who refuse must be imprisoned; Dr. Leete must have been lying on this point. Authoritarianism, income equality, and suppression of the division between manual and intellectual labor—however dubious an interpretation of the Industrial Army this might be—are Bachelder’s complaints against what he calls Bellamy’s “communism.”

Bachelder avoids accusing Bellamy of socialism, not because the latter famously rejected this “foreign” label himself, but because Bachelder’s alternative utopia, established on the island of Atlantis, bears some resemblance to socialist society. The term communism creates a rhetorical gap between Bachelder’s conservatism and Bellamy’s nationalism. The choice of terms suppresses the commonality between Bachelder and Bellamy. For instance, though Bachelder complains about the “hampered conditions” of the Nationalist economy, he advocates
a $100,000 cap to individual fortunes, price controls, and an eight-hour day—decidedly utopian measures, if we take a cue from Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor that the legislation of tomorrow is the utopianism of today (Goodwin and Taylor 5, 9, 36-37). Most labor within the free market, but doctors are public employees whose salaries are “fixed by the Board of Health, based on skill and merit” (32). A child is the “ward of the nation,” and schools are publicly funded. Without dismantling capitalism, Bachelder’s state-restricted economy would, according to the preamble to the regime’s constitution, “provide for the protection of all; to aid and encourage the weak to improve their condition, to check inordinate accumulation of wealth and secure the enactment of equitable and efficient laws tending to harmonize and equalize the social conditions of the people as far as possible…. (16-17). The ends of capitalism and socialism converge with the recognition of merit and the elimination of permanent class divisions: “All our legislation is intended to aid and elevate, to check monopoly and abolish castes. A man is a man for what he is” (51). Bachelder appeals to equality, the same master-signifier as Bellamy, redistributing Gilded Age resources more equitably and thereby establishing the conditions for greater equality of opportunity. To be sure, Bachelder’s utopia is not socialism. It would abolish caste, not class. It supports the semblance of meritocracy. It preserves the market and free trade (46), but it is not laissez-faire capitalism, either. It is some kind of mixed economy. But Bachelder certainly takes notes from Bellamy. He rejects egalitarian recognition in favor of a greater equality of opportunity and improved equality of resources. Insofar as Bachelder moderates Bellamy’s system while preserving a greater affirmation of difference, Bachelder seems to provide a more conservative but more adequate account of equality, both in terms of form and content, an opposition with a close analogy to aesthetics and ethics, and to narrative and propositional truth. If Dodd makes the contradictions of utopian-socialism plain, and
Bellamy anxiously tries to resolve them, Bachelder need only provide a mean between the extremes of epistolary monologue (Dodd) and a blend of dialogue and monologue (Bellamy) in an apparently harmonious narrative, a complacently moderate middle way, in order to establish a qualified equality of opportunity, circumscribed by a judicious redistribution of resources, as the meaning of 1890s utopianism: or, merit as the criterion of the good society.

Though the challenge of socialism made the question of equality urgent, it had no monopoly on the discourse of equality. Some utopians tried to make a straightforward argument in favor of capitalist prosperity. An example is Alvarado Fuller’s *A.D. 2000*, published in 1890, which—despite the author’s protest that he thought of it first—mimics Julian’s long sleep but which goes on to secure a conservative state of things: patriarchy, nationalism, wealth. President Emory D. Craft “ruled over the greatest nation on earth as a loving father rules his household, with justice and firmness” (201). Even Fuller’s regime, however, institutes a cap on profits, the surplus to be redistributed among workers (268). The image of the family here is significant, for family is a master signifier intimately related to equality. That is, family turns out to be the figure of equality in general, a signifier that brings together conservative and progressive alike in the image of the nation as family—a theme to which I will return below. By appropriating both equality, family, and nation and merging them into a single narrative, the single signifier of the presidency, Fuller perfects Bellamy’s tropes of closure—romantic love—in the single image of the family. The utopian-socialist answer to this concept of equality as family will come in William Dean Howells’s *Altrurian Romances*.

---

16 In the preface, Fuller declares: “Lest originality of title and theme be denied, it is but justice to myself to state that both were assumed in November, 1887.”
VII. The Altrurian Romances

Howells’s Altrurian romances follow an explicitly Hegelian logic. Writing home to his friend Cyril, Mr. Homos makes a textbook Hegelian statement: “We know that like produces like only up to a certain point, and that then unlike comes of like since all things are of one essence; that from life comes death at last, and from death comes life again in the final issue” (198-99). And during the speech in which Traveller culminates, Aristides declares that “[i]t seems to be a law of all life, that nothing can come to fruition without dying and seeming to make an end” (145).

The Altruria Trilogy—A Traveller from Altruria, Letters of an Altrurian Traveller, and Through the Eye of the Needle—transforms rigidly separate and self-identical phenomena into sameness; then, in a final move of the dialectic, regenerates their difference under a different aspect: capitalism passes into socialism, aesthetics and politics become articulated, and by this sequence both equality and difference between individuals is established. The driving force of this dialectic is love, and the name for the relationship it establishes is egalitarian recognition.

If one of the most recalcitrant quarrels at stake between capitalism and socialism, and thus between varieties of equality on offer in the 1890s, manifested itself in the opposition between aesthetics and politics, the challenge to the utopian-socialist writer was to show how socialism resolved this opposition. In fact, I submit that this quarrel was the quarrel at the level of literature, since it signified the economic relationship between individual and society, and the correlative recognition of particularity and acceptance of equality. The matter of aesthetics and politics, then, was first the question of how to resolve the claims of both recognition and equality, of cognitive and distributive justice, and second, the derivative question of how to marry aesthetics and politics, to write a piece of political fiction, with the efficacy of catalyzing political action. For the moment I can only suggest an answer to the first question; this is the
logically prior question, and the relationship of the utopian novel to the matter of catalyzing praxis will advanced toward in the chapter on the proletarian novel and treated fully in the chapter on the radical novel. William Dean Howells resolves the constitutive tension between aesthetics and ethics and between aesthetics and politics at the level of literary form as well as social content. Therefore, he resolves the antinomy of aesthetics and politics in the attempt to deal with a social contradiction.

The Altrurian trilogy, a sequence of texts that spans the 1890s and spills into the first years of the twentieth century, tells the story of Aristides Homos, a man who on an unofficial visit from the island utopia Altruria investigates social conditions in America. Through his incredulity towards the “colossal contradictions” of American society, most crucially between the formal equality attested to by the Declaration of Independence and the obviousnesses of political discourse, Mr. Homos asks naïve questions and becomes a sharp social critic. A Traveller from Altruria relates Mr. Homos’s visit to a mountain resort with a romance writer, Mr. Twelvemough, and his dialogue with a “little group” of bourgeois professionals—“they were intelligent and open-minded, and they were thoroughly American. One was a banker; another was a minister; there was a lawyer, and there was a doctor; there was a professor of political economy…; and there was a retired manufacturer” (31)—in which the traveler calls into question the injustices of capitalism: its denial of both equality and the acknowledgement of individual persons. However, this tense dialogue develops into a final monologue in which Homos seems to synthesize the histories of America and Altruria, declaring that “America prophesies another Altruria” (164). The book closes, though, on two divisions: the persistent ideological division between working and middle classes, and the related fact that Mr. Homos’s middle-class audience seems to remain of “two minds” on the question of his veracity, the question not merely
of whether Altruria is actual but whether socialism itself is possible. The middle and upper classes escape a full reconciliation with Altruria, “continu[ing] of two minds upon” whether Altruria exists and whether Mr. Homos is from it (179). This doubt is a stay against the conclusion that Altruria and America are “really one at heart” (23). This residual failure of rhetoric means that the dialogue between America and Altruria is incomplete.

*Traveller* thus oscillates between dialogue and monologue, and wavers at last at an impasse between perspectives. This impasse seems to suppress narrative itself in *Letters*, which turns out to be a univocal complaint from Homos to Cyril, lacking the dialectic of any conversation. The charming naivete of Mr. Homos as the *Traveller from Altruria* turns out in *Letters of an Altrurian Traveller* to have been feigned, a bitter irony that lacks all the hope of Socratic dialectic. America no longer seems to prophesy another Altruria, except in the simulacrum of the Chicago World’s Fair, with which a homesick Aristides becomes infatuated. The dynamism of dialogue returns as love in *Through the Eye of the Needle*, an account of the courtship between Aristides and Eveleth Strange; the first part returns to the epistolary form between Mr. Homos and Cyril, while the second part features Eveleth’s story to Mrs. Makely. The juxtaposed lovers’ letters tell successive stories of individual development; the shared responsibility for the telling suggests parity between the lovers. In a two-part structure of *Bildungsromanen*, Mr. Homos passes from disillusionment, loneliness amidst the individual alienation of capitalism, to the fulfillment of love; Eveleth transforms from a lonely widow who resents her wealth to a full-fledged Altrurian whose only property is her labor, where labor is not proletarian but an expression of love—this agape only doubles her eros for Aristides. The limpid, lightly ironic dialogue of the beginning of *Traveller* gives way to the heavier negative moment of monologue, a rhetorical failure against the ideology of liberalism; this monologue continues in
the largely serious complaints of \textit{Letters}; and only recovers its bright dialogical form in the juxtaposed perspectives of Aristides and Eveleth in \textit{Eye of the Needle}. Homos writes to Cyril: from life to death to life again.

In \textit{A Traveller from Altruria}, Aristides Homos affirms a recognition without invidious differences of prestige. He registers naivety and surprise as he discerns the “colossal” contradictions that fissure American society, such as the simultaneous acknowledgement of “the honor of work and the recognition of personal worth everywhere” with the admission that some work is more honorable than others (33, 11). “So it seems,” remarks Mr. Homos, “that while all honest work is honored among you, there are some kinds of honest work that are not honored so much as others” (15). And the rewards of the honest work are inconsistent. Mr. Homos’s critique intertwines considerations of recognition and the distribution of wealth. Mr. Homos innocently asks of “your mechanics and day laborers, “[D]o they prefer to go to resorts of their own?” (29). It is because mechanics and laborers are not respected that they do not have money and time for vacationing.

\textit{Traveller}, then, sets up the following relationship between distributive and recognition justice. Equal distribution—the elimination of social class—is the precondition for a relationship of respect for individual differences. Far from wealth facilitating the development of individual idiosyncrasy that is the stuff of the recognition of difference, it inhibits such development. Only when Eveleth arrives in Altruria can she take over the narrative from Aristides and explore her own experience of socialism. As Eveleth relinquishes her wealth and accepts equality of resources, she makes herself anew: that is, she attains a new, different status, a sublation of her old privileged position that preserves her ethical distinction. Altruria is the harmony of self-transformation on the one hand and equality between selves on the other hand. This harmony has
its correlative, at the level of politics with a reconciliation of two models of justice, distributive and
distributive and reflective, which are often taken as antithetical. This homology between aesthetics and
ethics on the one hand and recognition and distribution on the other shows the political stakes of
Dodd’s original contradiction. The development of the ethics and aesthetics of the self in the
conversion of Eveleth Strange to “altrurianism” and the love between her and Aristides Homos
instantiates an intersubjective recognition whose mutuality confirms its egalitarian quality;
meanwhile, this altrurianism, intimate love under a political aspect, is the discourse that justifies
an absolute equality of resources. This recognitive and distributive egalitarianism is universal—
at least potentially and in principle. Love, then, is the resolution of Dodd’s aesthetics/ethics
contradiction and the larger contradiction of recognition and distribution of resources. Thus
Howells appropriates Bellamy’s socialist dialogue (in Traveller), Dodd’s epistolary satire (in
Letters), and Fuller’s narrative in A.D. 2000 (in Eye of the Needle). Howells’s ideal of justice is
the reconciliation of recognition and distribution, or respect for the particulars of individuality
and intersubjectivity on one hand and an impartial commitment to equal resources on the other.
This equality of love is expressed, however, with recourse to a more fundamental master-
signifier, that of the family. As Aristides explains to the crowd, “We are, properly speaking, a
family rather than a nation like yours” (162). I say that family is more fundamental because the
value of the family constituted the historically conditioned horizon of the 1890s; no one could
doubt its value, and when a relatively new, i.e. modern in the sense of the French and American
Revolutions, signifier such as equality was invoked at that time, its play of signification could be
arrested and buttressed with conservative tradition in the concept of the family. The family, as
the irreducible unit of society, or society unto itself, in which equality of resources prevailed,
provided a model for socialists that would appeal even to conservatives as a synecdoche of
society as a whole. In the Altrurian state the preceding stages of recognition, love and equality, are preserved in the literal family and its tropic extension into society itself. This broad reach is itself the most intimate, for it begins with the position of servants (“as they are cruelly called”): they “form really no part of the house, but are aliens in the household and the family life” (297).

In Traveller, Aristides remarks on the hard truth of American society that “while all honest work is honored among you, there are some kinds of honest work that are not honored so much as others,” implying that equal recognition of the prestige of all work would be more consistent with American values (15). Egalitarian recognition would acknowledge service as a constitutive role of the family, with equality of resources and equality of recognition. This statement suggests two different claims: that Altruria is indeed a nation, but a nation unlike America, or that Altruria is not a nation at all but properly a family.

The difference between nation and family, then, requires explication. For Benedict Anderson, the striking aspect of the nation is its definition as community without face-to-face connection. Traditionally, community was conceived as a face-to-face encounter with people one knows. A nation instead is an “imagined community”—the knowledge of one’s neighbor is imagined in the absence of any face-to-face connection (Anderson 6). If nation is a kind of community, family makes a break even with nation. In Traveller, Aristides reveals that the family is not the nation but humankind itself: “We do not conceive of the human race except as a family” (69). Family as humankind, in contrast to Fuller’s patriarchal conception, is an egalitarian and even quasi-anarchist vision. The “authorities” to which Eveleth vaguely refers play little role in the otherwise decentralized functioning of Altrurian society (396); Aristides relates in his speech that, “As the whole people control affairs, no man works for another, and no man pays another….We are, properly speaking, a family rather than a nation like yours”
Yet the society gains coherence through its constitution as a family: all relationships are, in principle at any rate, face to face: the boatful of girls greets Eveleth with kisses when her ship comes in.

VIII. A Postcolonial Critique of the “Classical Utopia”

Dohra Ahmad observes that Howells, no less than his fellow utopian-socialist Bellamy, offers a homogenizing paradigm of the process of ostensibly universal recognition: this paradigm is strictly Western, white, and even imperialist and racist:

…canonical American utopian novels imagine a nation that is racially homogenous, and a world that is unevenly developed. They thoroughly excise black Americans, while allowing Asians and Africans to aspire to a predetermined utopian telos. Development—here, in the form of developmentalist utopian fiction—affects and even envisions each group very differently. (Ahmad 11)

The image of the good society that the utopian-socialist novelists of the 1890s provide is “developmentalist.” By developmentalism Ahmad means the view that humanity progresses according to “linear, teleological models of history” with a corollary “perception of the ‘primitive’ as a benighted and long-vanished condition” (20). It follows that the evident universality of utopian socialism is radically limited to white American and Europeans and exclusive of people of color and colonial subalterns. The ostensible impulse to liberation in Bellamy, Howells, and others in fact excludes the impulse to liberation from colonial domination.

Ahmad appears on the whole correct that in fact Nationalist America and Altruria are racially homogenous and as such they fail to match their own ideals of universality. It is worth noting, however, that Howells acknowledges this homogeneity as a kind of political horizon of
his own time, suggesting obliquely, by ironizing the fictitious conservative editor who prefaces *Through the Eye of the Needle*, that “the gospel of race preservation” and “the divine approval of our victory” in the Spanish-American War, that ideologies of white supremacy and imperialism that readers might be tempted to read into preceding books of the trilogy are to be rejected (*Needle* 270). Yet even if there persists a contradiction between egalitarianism and exclusion, this does not in principle discredit the ideal of universality, but it tempers any optimistic hopes of its instantiation. An example of the possibility of this instantiation, however, appears in the notion of the master-signifier. The master-signifier is contingent and provisional, without logically necessary connections to the rest of the field. If this account of master-signification is coherent, it suggests the possibility of articulating, e.g., the signifier of equality with the signifier of anti-colonial difference, since there is no logically necessary connection between equality and the exclusion of difference. The consistency I claim here between equality and recognition of difference can be seen by the distinction between equality and identity. As Stefan Gosepath observes, “‘Equality’ needs…to be distinguished from ‘identity’—this concept signifying that one and the same object corresponds to itself in all its features” (section 1). By implication, any assertion of identity between two entities (e.g., two individual persons), if such an assertion is coherent at all, would have to be justified by showing that the two entities shared all and only the same properties.\(^{17}\) Accordingly, there is no contradiction in *Traveller* between Aristides’s consistent treatment of “every human being he met, exactly as if they were equals” (134) and the narrator Mr. Twelvemough’s affirmation of “that accidental picturesqueness which results from the groupings of all sorts of faces and costumes”—the heterogeneous audience of Aristides’s monologue (145).

\(^{17}\) I am indebted to Frank Mashburn for this point.
Furthermore, the ideology of developmentalism is also challenged by Howells’s irony, when he attributes to a fictitious editor the interesting argument that “If our good-fortune should be continued to us in reward of our public and private virtue, the fact would suggest to so candid an observer [as Mr. Homos] that in economics, as in other things, the rule proves the exception, and that as good times have hitherto always been succeeded by bad times, it stands to reason that our present period of prosperity will never be followed by a period of adversity” (272). Howells here is implicitly skeptical about the claims of a Progressive Era that labor is now “united with capital in bonds of closest affection” (271). By the second volume of the trilogy Mr. Homos’s initial naïveté has been unmasked as Socratic irony and his optimism revealed to be dull social critique; so by the third volume we do not have to take his words straight when, echoing the sanguine words of his first monologue, he comments to his fellow Altrurian Cyril that “our own state is testimony of a potential civility in all states, which we must keep in mind when we judge the peoples of the plutocratic world” (275). Yet even if this hope were not ironized, it would turn on its head the nineteenth-century premise of progress shared by liberals and some socialists alike with the claim that the developed capitalist nations, the “so-called Christian countries” (431), as opposed to “pre-capitalist” societies, are the relatively savage ones.

There is a contradiction between the ideals Howells explicitly affirms and those that his society instantiates. This doubles the contradiction inherent in America itself, doubling in the sense of mirroring as well as magnifying, for the starkness of the difference between Tocqueville’s ideal of equality and Gilded Age inequality is emphasized further in the difference between utopian ideal and utopian instantiation: for we expect the most out of utopia, hold it to a higher standard, its own standard. Yet this contradiction between standard and instantiation is not a flat but a dialectical contradiction.
Ahmad herself appears still committed to dialectical tension by her very affirmation of some principle of “solidarity,” if not universality: “…despite the many problems with solidarity that come up in the course of Landscapes of Hope, I still believe in the quest for a better order, and I offer this book on that idealistic premise” (17). And she shares the hope of the transformative power of utopian writing as such, even if a particular instantiation of it fails: “Many techniques [of the classical writers] prove worth appropriating, mostly [sic] obviously and importantly the utopian endeavor itself, the bold premise that one can write one’s way out of a present injustice” (Ahmad 13). I would like to build on these shared premises between Ahmad’s study and my own, in the hope that a kind of solidarity and vision of a better order can emerge after the charge of developmentalism is answered.

The charge is finally a special case of the intersectionality critique broached above. While Howells seems aware of the limitations of his own assertions of universality, he is nonetheless thus limited. Just as scientific socialism developed out of utopian socialism, so the proletarian novel develops out of the logic of the utopian novel; while the utopian-socialist novel answered the question of universality in an abstract, inadequate, and finally false way, it set a standard, asserted a criterial property, of recognition that would be taken up later by the proletarian novel. The question of the universality of recognition, the challenge of solidarity, will be raised again and answered more adequately in the proletarian novel.
Chapter 3. The Lumpenproletarian Novel: Interpellation, Defamiliarization, Recognition

I. From Utopian to Proletarian

As I showed in the introduction, Engels linked utopian and scientific socialism along several axes: (1) bourgeois or “universal” agency versus proletarian agency; (2) “evolution out of men’s brains” versus objective material transformation and thus “spiritual” versus “material. Evolution out of men’s brains, however, does not imply “evolutionary” as opposed to “revolutionary” historical change. Rather, just because utopian socialism has its origin in thinking, it is a break with material history, and in this breakage it is revolutionary. Indeed, it is Engels’s scientific socialism, with its faith in the evolutionary progress of history, that finally rejects revolution. Another implication, (3), is prediction of the post-revolutionary future in rich detail versus an account only as far as the “dictatorship of the proletariat.” It remains to be seen (I will treat this issue in the following chapter) how a free break with history can issue in predictable results. In the preceding chapter on the utopian novel, we saw how the utopian novel treats the issues of universality (1), particularly in the case of thinking through the meaning of equality and its implications for universality. In the present chapter we will continue the discussion of (1), showing how the apparent particularity of the proletarian novel answers the intersectionality (more specifically, postcolonial) critique of the utopian novel, while reaffirming a new kind of universality articulated with the particular. The mediating concept here will be the lumpenproletariat, the dregs of both bourgeoisie and proletariat—and, indeed, all classes of society, whatever those are in a given historical instance. Also in the present chapter we will discuss the elements of (2) the relationship between spiritual and material. Marx (in “Critique of the Gotha Program”) charges that equality is only a bourgeois ideal, or, a term of ideology (a concept to be clarified in the present chapter), evolved out of men’s brains that in fact preempts
material change, and particularly revolutionary change. Our discussion of the lumpenproletariat will locate agency not only in the ideal of equality but in the actions of love, which is at once universal and particular and spiritual and material. Despite its sublative capacity, love is, like equality, a limited relation of recognition (indeed, I will argue throughout this study that all relationships of recognition are limited) that must be further comprehended by solidarity. It should be noted that Honneth, following Hegel, begins his schema of recognition with the relationship of love, as the primary sort of recognition that builds one’s identity through the intimacy of family and friends. Equality is the second relationship of recognition, the universal that follows on the particularity of love. Why the discrepancy between my model and his? Why, indeed, the presumptuousness in appropriating, then revising, Hegelian theory?

First, I do not want to propose the new ordering of relations of recognition as a revision of Hegel, but a mere application of the same theory in a different context and for a different purpose. My purpose is not the justification of modern institutions through a theory of recognition but a sketch of how recognition might still be possible in the event that these institutions fail. Put positively, I want to offer a “socialist” rather than “bourgeois” account (though utopianism, as I have already shown, tends to doubt this dichotomy), an account that demonstrates the salutary nature of recognition in the absence of the traditional family, or the failure of the justice system, or (as I shall argue in the chapter on the radical novel) the failure of the state in making good on its recognitive promises. I began with equality because, ontogenetically and phylogenetically, that’s where a socialist theory of subject-formation began: the bourgeois axiom of all men being created equal and the Marxist axiom that our agency is inaugurated as equal subjects (free and subjected) before the law. This equality is the condition of possibility for love.
The lumpenproletariat is the term for a failure of modern institutions, whether family or civil society or economy or state. As I will show in more detail below, the lumpenproletariat is the name for all those excluded from these institutions. It is formed by the process of déclassement or falling out of one’s class. Dreiser’s George Hurstwood, the reputable middle-class manager reduced to a flophouse suicide, is a paradigmatic lumpenproletarian: deprived of the material goods of work and shelter and the psychological benefits of love, respect, and hope. The lumpenproletariat is a kind of perverse sublation of the classes of society as individuals slough off their class-situated virtues, whether individualism or solidarity, and are reduced to an isolation whose only relief is a form of love: a mutual aid in the absence of economic respite. If mutual aid usually signifies an economic relationship of solidarity, mutual aid in the lumpenproletarian sense is an oxymoron, or, it is a nascent relationship of mutual aid, a precondition of economic recognition. The lumpenproletariat is therefore classless in a revolting way, utopian in a bad way. Yet in its classlessness—its universality of déclassement—and in its aggregate—its particularity of random individuals—it takes up the challenge of intersectionality and forges out of the divisions of humanity the preconditions for a kind of solidarity. The lumpenproletariat is an aggregate of wildly different individuals that yet endure through the mutual aid of love.

In this chapter I will begin to explore the epistemological implications of recognition. If in the English- and French-speaking world of ideology critique, recognition has, in contradistinction from its strictly ethical German meaning, an epistemological dimension as well (Honneth “Recognition as Ideology” 79); and if, after Althusser, recognition has come to mean “misrecognition” or necessarily ideology, then I propose that it is possible and desirable to recover an epistemological sense of recognition current before Althusser. Yet this new sense of
*recognition as truth* would take into account the Althusserian critique and set itself in a relationship of veracity to the Althusserian sense of illusion. It might be objected at the outset that, if Althusser’s theory develops a concept of ideology as material practice, it makes little sense to talk of an illusory practice. A belief can be said to be true or false, but a practice cannot be said to be true or false. This assumption, however, is incorrect. Althusser does not succeed in fully jettisoning the propositional content of ideology as false consciousness. He preserves the term “consciousness” in his theory, for Pascal’s example of attending to mass to inspire belief shows that practice still depends, logically, on presupposed belief. Pascal recommends one fake it (practice without conscious belief) until you make it (undergirding practice with conscious belief) (Althusser “Ideology” 177-83). Furthermore, Althusser’s own use of “imaginary,” while not synonymous with “false,” nonetheless implies falsehood. For “imaginary” in the Lacanian sense—the sense that Althusser appropriates—signifies a relationship of unity with the “other” (the mother, the “big Other”) when in fact that relationship is one of alienation. Althusser’s own concepts imply ascriptions of truth and falsity and thus retain a residual commitment to the theory of ideology as false consciousness. In accordance with my own socialist hermeneutic, I do not intend to sweep Althusser’s theory aside but to appreciate its materialist insights at the same time as I appreciate the insights of a utopian Hegelianism. In observing this commitment I mean only to observe an ambiguity that my own term, recognition, will reflect, for recognition has both a propositional content—a *real* as opposed to imaginary relationship between subjects—and a narrative content—an affirmative as opposed to a class- or “cash-nexus”-based exploitative relationship between subjects. This apparent ambiguity is in fact a precise formal correlate to the structure of genre itself, the structure of (propositional) argument and (intersubjective) narrative. Recognition is the opposite of ideology, the truth carried by both argument and narrative. It is in
fact a kind of “shock of recognition”—the aesthetic shock of what the Russian Formalists called *defamiliarization*—that enables the transition from seeing the other in terms of ideology to seeing the other in terms of truth. The situation of the lumpenproletariat is indeed a terrible one, but it is thereby shocking in a way that inspires recognition. There is therefore something salutary—even utopian—in reading the literature of the lumpenproletariat.

To place the lumpenproletariat at the center of a theory of recognition is a problem for both Hegel and Marx. I have already shown in the introduction what problems Hegel had reconciling the existence of the “rabble” with the rationality and justice of his “realm of actualized freedom.” The lumpenproletariat was also a scandal to Marx and Engels. In the *Communist Manifesto*, they called it the “dangerous class,” and accused it of having no stable ideological tendency—because, as we will see, it had no stable identity: “The ‘dangerous class’, the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society, may, here an there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue” (21). If for Hegel the lumpenproletariat was a threat to the stability of capitalist society, so for Marx and Engels it was a threat to the success of proletarian revolution.

II. The Lumpenproletariat

According to the *Communist Manifesto*, the “history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” (2). And Marx and Engels define history even more broadly as a struggle between “oppressor and oppressed” (2). Classes are necessarily antagonistic; and the nature of that antagonism is oppression. Yet at the same time, the antagonism consists of resistance and revolution: the struggle is dialectical. The *Manifesto* can sum everything up history in such a slim volume precisely because it is premised on the Hegelian view that conflict
is definitive of history: or History, as I called it in the introduction to this study. Notoriously, this notion of History excluded all but the “Oriental,” “Greek,” “Roman,” and “Germanic” worlds (Introduction to the Philosophy of History 92-98). Yet it also excluded much social reality internal to the west.

In The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Karl Marx disparages the unsavory supporters of Louis Bonaparte. He calls this group the lumpenproletariat.

Alongside decayed roués with dubious means of subsistence and of dubious origin, alongside ruined and adventurous offshoots of the bourgeoisie, were vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, mountebanks, lazzaroni, pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, maquereaus, brothel keepers, porters, literati, organ-grinders, ragpickers, knife grinders, tinkers, beggars—in short, the whole indefinite, disintegrated mass, thrown hither and thither, which the French term la bohème. (75)

It is hard to see what gives consistency to this catalogue, other than support for Bonaparte, but a few family resemblances crop up: unemployment, marginal employment, illegal employment. The members of the list are ex-bourgeois or ex-proletarian, “refuse of all classes” (Eighteenth 75). In the strict Marxist sense of “class” there is no lumpenproletarian class of which to be conscious. There is only an aggregate without essence or telos. In a sense, then, the lumpenproletariat is the state of having fallen out of class: it is “classless” not only in the sense of déclassé but also in a sense, neither radical nor liberal, of a “classless society.” Yet this lack of class may also suggest that the lumpenproletariat resists attempts at class analysis. Marx does not make objective remarks on lumpenproletarian social position. He seems to criticize the values of

18 Thanks to Tetiana Soviak for pointing this out to me.
the group: its members are dubious, dishonorable, deceptive, greedy, pathetic. According to one dictionary, *bohème* suggests “gipsy” and the insulting connotation of “careless, unconventional habits” (Cassell). “Lumpenproletariat” seems to signify class position but is really the dissolution of class positions; and it hints at (or declares) some deficiency of moral values. Marx’s uncharacteristically moral judgments are a sign of a certain anxiety about the lumpenproletariat’s dissolution of class position and its accompanying challenge to all social aspiration.

The classless society as evoked by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* is supposed to be a convergence of individual and universal, difference and equality: an “association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (41). Yet only the lumpenproletariat actualizes this association of distribution and recognition in a metonymy that haunts capitalism and communism alike. The lumpenproletariat does not thus necessarily promote a “Third Way,” such as that of fascism, though socialists have feared the lumpenproletariat as “particularly vulnerable to reactionary ideologies and movements” (Bottomore 293). Indeed, the lumpenproletariat as an aggregate without essence promotes no politics at all. Rather, the presence of the lumpenproletariat, variable at historical moments but constant in its exclusion from class and class morality, is not just a moral affirmation but a constant critique of the invidious distinctions, distributive or recognition, of society, capitalist or socialist.

On certain radical accounts, the lumpenproletariat is a structurally necessary feature of capitalist society and will disappear with the advent of socialism. Marx and Mikhail Bakunin

---

19 Roger Eatwell reports that “Intellectual fascists were often to term themselves supporters of a ‘Third Way,’ neither left nor right, neither capitalist nor communist: they sought to achieve individual prosperity, but linked to communal goals” (14).
bickered over the identity of the lumpenproletariat, a dispute made possible by the fact the lumpenproletariat lacked intrinsic identity. Marx and Engels called the lumpenproletariat a “passively rotting mass” (Manifesto 21), ideologically indeterminate but liable to reaction, while the anarchist Bakunin contended that from the mass bloomed the “flower of the proletariat,” the promise of socialist revolution (Bakunin 48). “By the flower of the proletariat,” Bakunin declares, “I mean above all, that great mass, those millions of non-civilised, disinherited, wretched and illiterates whom Messrs. Engels and Marx mean to subject to the paternal regime of a very strong government” (48, emphasis original). Both radicals co-opted some aspect of the unstructured or aggregative nature of the lumpenproletariat. Marx doubted that the lumpenproletariat could be organized and must only be the object, not the subject, of power. Bakunin found this lack of organization or attachment to any structure of society to be potentially revolutionary: “being very nearly unpolluted by all bourgeois civilization [it] carries in its heart, in its aspirations in all necessities and the miseries of its collective position, all the germs of the Socialism of the future, and which alone is powerful enough to-day to inaugurate the Social Revolution and bring it to triumph” (48). What Marx and Bakunin have in common is the presupposition that, in Peter Stallybrass’s judgment, the lumpenproletariat’s “identity cannot be given in advance of the moment of political articulation” (88). A curious consequence of both Marx’s and Bakunin’s readings of the lumpenproletariat is that the moment of political articulation is always also a dissolution of lumpenproletarian identity; the aggregate is no longer déclassé but proletarian or bourgeois. Marx and Bakunin, whatever their differences, together fantasized that this disconcerting aggregate, threat to proletariat and bourgeoisie alike, would vanish in the moment of recognition: this disappearance would usher in the social revolution. Conversely, the maintenance of some lumpenproletarian status (anti-statist, unstable) before the
moment of political articulation is an obstacle to revolution: a radical impediment, a critique of the whole process of class ascendancy.

But the historical situation of the lumpenproletariat we are dealing with in a study of socialist fiction is not the mid-nineteenth century but the 1930s. If the lumpenproletariat of the 1840s and 50s is indeterminate in nature, unified only by family resemblances, it is no less cohesive in the 1930s. There is no certainly no decisive justification in Marx to identify the lumpenproletariat with the homeless and/or jobless, but a remarkable story by Tom Kromer called “Hungry Men” strongly associates homelessness and joblessness and the desperate condition of the lumpenproletariat. But that desperate affect changes over the course of the story: in 1930, the narrator reports, “We are the lumpenproletariat…of whom you can expect nothing” (“Hungry Men” 214, emphasis original). In 1931, the narrator revises his line—“We do not expect the revolution from the Proletariat”—a revision that signals both despair but prepares the way for a different agent of history (217). In 1932, that agency (perhaps commensurate with the growing numbers of the lumpenproletariat) has increased modestly, “but you don’t want to expect too much help in the revolution from the lumpenproletariat” (218). In 1934, the lumpenproletariat eludes the notice of the cops, who are distracted by the strikers (221). But in the final scene of 1935, the “hungry faced men” coalesce as a single agent to appropriate all property in the final phrase of the story: “STAND ASIDE!” (223) This demand is addressed not only to the strike-breaking cops and militia but to the proletariat conceived as an exclusive revolutionary unit. But this is not a final act of exclusion but a seizure of the images of proletarian revolution to make lumpenproletariat and proletariat indistinguishable—“Our riveting guns built the skyscrapers and bridges, / Our shovels dug the mines and highways, laid the rails, / Our muscles and blood went into the ships, / Went into the fields and all that’s here—
"(223). In support of Kromer’s (mis)appropriation of Marx’s concept, we might note that “proletariat” is a similarly slippery concept, dependent on a certain “imputation” of class consciousness (Lukács History 51-52). Kromer, then, imputes a lumpenproletarian consciousness to the homeless and jobless, but his remarkable imposition is that this consciousness is neither quiescent nor conservative but finally, in a dialectical reversal, revolutionary. This reversal is an instance of what Viktor Shklovsky called defamiliarization, a concept I will manipulate further below. As Hegel might have put it, the truth of the proletariat is the lumpenproletariat. This is so in a threefold sense. The first was the truth of fear: everyone’s job was in danger. The suicide in Tom Kromer’s Waiting for Nothing is a freshly laid-off “guy in a gray suit,” who shoots himself in the mission bathroom (Waiting 40-42). The second is the truth of empirical fact, the tendency of the work force: in 1933, a quarter of working Americans lacked jobs and, as David M. Kennedy writes, “in no subsequent year in the 1930s would the unemployment rate fall below 14 percent. The average for the decade as a whole was 17.1 percent” (163, 166). Third, there was the truth of political possibility: as Kromer’s story implies, the success of the working class’s revolutionary hopes depended on those who did not work.

The lumpenproletarian critique is not intellectually detached but practical. There is a recognition proper to this lumpenproletariat that is not premised on identity, essence, or telos, nor on the dissolution of the aggregate. This properly lumpenproletarian recognition refuses political articulation insofar as it is absent from history, if history is conceived of as progress from domination to freedom, yet its presence criticizes the shortcomings of this progress and substitutes for it a regress to the primary relation of love. This does not mean some recovery of the family or a retreat to a private sphere. Rather, the lumpenproletariat belongs on the streets,
and its love must be ecstatic in the sense that it cannot be confined to the privacy of the bedroom or the self-identity of the home.

III. Althusser, Hegel, Shklovsky

If Louis Althusser counselled suspicion of ideological “obviousness,” one might well be suspicious that his own theory of ideology has long enjoyed the status of obviousness. Althusser’s theory gives an account of “ideological State apparatuses” (ISAs): the bourgeois institutions, notably family, education, and religion, that shape the subject to secure its “submission to the rules of established order” and accept a certain position in the socio-economic whole (132). Althusser holds that all recognition is “misrecognition” or “interpellation” mediated by these apparatuses. Interpellation is the process of a subject being caught up in an “imaginary” relation to other people and to the social whole. This relation is imaginary because it is the stage on which a subject assumes an illusory freedom; in fact its actions are determined by the ISAs (182).

Althusser’s Marxist theory stands Hegelian recognition on its head. While for Althusser the ISAs ensure the individual’s “subjection,” for Hegel analogous institutions of family, civil society, and state ultimately guarantee the freedom of the individual (Althusser 143). Hegelian freedom, to be sure, is not “negative” freedom from external constraint. It is rather a “positive” freedom of adherence to institutions that help one actualize one’s potential as a rational being. In contradiction to this, Althusser maintains that the purpose of such institutions is not freedom but subordination. Althusser avers that no one, not even “bad subjects”—or those who try to

---

20 Winfried Fluck also opposes recognition to interpellation (50).

21 On the distinction between negative and positive freedom, see Isaiah Berlin’s “Two Concepts of Liberty.”
resist subordination to institutions—are exempt from interpellation (181). There is no “outside” to ideology: all practices are ideological (175, 170).

Hegelian recognition, by contrast, is the network of mutual relationships that shape the subject within what Hegel calls the “realm of actualized freedom.” Again, this freedom is positive, structured by the “ethical substance” that is society: family, civil society, and state. What for Althusser are ISAs are for Hegel the structures in which “the will is free, so that freedom constitutes its substance and destiny” (*Elements* 35, emphasis original). Indeed, in the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* the apparatuses of family, civil society, and state are the conditions of freedom rather than subjection. Axel Honneth explains that for Hegel “a subject is only truly free if it directs all its efforts towards finding itself in a world whose structure is an expression of the subject’s own will” (*I in We* 23). According to Honneth, the family is the source of love; civil society the realm of equality; and the state the bonds of solidarity (Honneth *Struggle* 25, see Hegel *Elements* 64): love, equality, and solidarity are the conditions of possibility for freedom, the actualization of one’s potential within society.

Althusser’s and Honneth’s accounts of subject formation, labeled respectively interpellation and recognition, and characterized by subjection and freedom, alienation and solidarity, pose a paradox. They appear like Wittgenstein’s duck-rabbit picture, an image in which the bill of a duck can also be seen as the ears of a rabbit, so that one can switch between seeing the same image as a different animal (Wittgenstein 194). The oscillation between seeing subject-formation as subjection and seeing it as freedom is analogous to the shift from seeing the picture as a duck to seeing it as a rabbit. Wittgenstein tries to debunk the inclination to attribute the process of perception or “seeing-as” to either subjective or objective factors with a characteristically paradoxical observation: “The expression of a change of aspect is the
expression of a new perception and at the same time of the perception’s being unchanged” (196). If we insist on one alternative or another, language “goes on holiday” and leads to mysterious ontological implications: if the image changes, something “queer” must be going on in either the subject or the object or both (19)! For Wittgenstein, the duck-rabbit is only a picture that “holds us captive” (48). In the case of Althusser and Hegel, however, the stakes of captivity seem more momentous than a theory of perception. Wittgenstein seems to make a conservative point when he urges that “What has to be accepted, the given, is…forms of life” (226, emphasis original). A form of life is our conventional activity that exists in a mutually constitutive relationship with our common manners of speaking: “To imagine a language,” postulates Wittgenstein, “is to imagine a form of life” (8). Yet the paradox that Althusser and Hegel pose is whether our institutions, our forms of life, recognize our agency: whether they are capable of securing our freedom.

Wittgenstein’s comments on perceptual shifts as well as his conservatism about forms of life may be counterposed to Viktor Shklovsky’s notion of defamiliarization. Shklovsky, too, theorizes shifts in perception, but for him the shifts come about through a salutary warping of language, and they have ethical implications. This distortion or defamiliarization is the function of art par excellence. In Shklovsky’s famous formulation, “art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony” (12). Shklovsky asserts that art, and specifically poetic language, which may manifest in “poetry” as well as “prose,” departs from the everyday, the logical, the chronological, or the grammatical. Defamiliarization, which is the use of figurative or strange language when clichés usually serve the purpose of describing or engaging with the world, arrests the “automatism of perception” and resets one’s experience of the world so that one can perceive its contours anew and act
accordingly (22). If Wittgenstein warns us against going against the grain of our grammar, of trying to “justify” our language-games (200) or trying to test the cogency of “custom and upbringing” (201), Shklovsky urges us rather to subject our language games to such tests: to distort words, to try out the “difficult, roughened, impeded language” of poetry (“Art” 23). What Wittgenstein calls the “dawning of an aspect” (of a duck, a rabbit) is indeed only a transition from one convention to another. But the process of defamiliarization is the technique of figurative language that violates convention: for example, seeing the duck-rabbit as a human face.

Given the canonical and obvious status of the theory of interpellation, the theory stands by its own premises in need of defamiliarization. Defamiliarization of a perception is different from refutation of an argument. To defamiliarize Althusser’s theory is not only to challenge the theory’s adequacy as a complete account of subject formation but to undermine the very efficacy of the process of interpellation to the extent that that process governs subject formation.22 Defamiliarization disrupts the automatism of perception in order to enable the disruption of the automatism of agency itself. Thus defamiliarization may challenge interpellation or misrecognition in a moment of ground-clearing for a recognition properly so-called.

Winfried Fluck has recommended that critics “read for recognition,” premising this program on the ubiquity of the phenomenon of recognition, which appears everywhere, he claims, from the stories of Hans Christian Andersen to the novels of Henry James (45). But his concept of recognition is interpellative insofar as it depends upon invidious distinctions between persons—for example, between the moral high ground of Isabel Archer and the duplicity of Madame Merle, or the class distinctions between Cinderella and her relatives. A recognition that

resists interpellation appears elsewhere, for example, in a marginal Depression-era collection of novels about the worst-off in the U.S. In her analysis of proletarian fiction, Barbara Foley largely excludes these novels, because they fail to depict a Hegelian Marxist progression of consciousness and thus fail to conform to the revolutionary essence of the genre. Although these texts such as Edward Dahlberg’s *Bottom Dogs* and Nelson Algren’s *Somebody in Boots*, Tom Kromer’s *Waiting for Nothing* and Edward Newhouse’s *You Can’t Sleep Here*, “resonate with veracity,” “none treats the entire life span of its hero and focuses its didacticism around the dialectical issue of simultaneously retaining and negating working-class origins” (Foley 287). These novels depict not the proletariat but what is sometimes called the lumpenproletariat: the unemployed, marginally employed, or illegally employed; orphans, prostitutes, and criminals. Dahlberg et al. model a recognition of absolute equality of humankind and the most fundamental kind of solidarity, since humankind in its most naked state is foregrounded and affirmed through a relationship of love. If the picture of subjectivity that this aggregate of novels presents is plausible, then neither Althusser’s picture nor Hegel’s, framed as they are by the state, has to hold us captive. This is not to say that defamiliarization is either mimetically or deductively “plausible”—it is neither a representation nor an argument; rather, it is in some sense compelling, a sort of revelation, but leaves us free to accept or reject it, to act on it or not. Defamiliarization is a sharpening of perception that inspires a certain ethical stance. Novels of the “bottom dogs” are a passage from obviousness through defamiliarization that will enable an opening onto a new and strange kind of familiarity, the recognitional relationship of love that sets one free to imagine new language games, new forms of life.
IV. Recognition in Lumpenproletarian Novels

The lumpenproletariat appears sporadically in the literature of class in the U.S., most prominently in Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, and others of the mainstream naturalist tradition. This tradition interpellates the proletariat of the rags as repulsive (Crane) or pathetic (Dreiser), largely eliciting pity but not implication in the lives of that aggregate. The attempt to render the self-recognition immanent to the lumpenproletariat came from within what Michael Gold called the proletarian realism of the 1930s, when the Depression had swollen the aggregate of the unemployed, the marginally employed, and the homeless. But the lumpenproletarian novel is an inconsistent element within the category of the proletarian novel. The latter genre is, as Barbara Foley’s analysis has shown, the category of 1930s texts that adopted a revolutionary Marxist perspective on class in America. Foley excludes novels of the lumpenproletariat in a brief but significant dismissal: although these texts such as *Bottom Dogs* and *Somebody in Boots*, *Waiting for Nothing* or *You Can’t Sleep Here*, “resonate with veracity,” “none treats the entire life span of its hero and focuses its didacticism around the dialectical issue of simultaneously retaining and negating working-class origins” (Foley 287). Lumpenproletarian novels, picaresque parodies of both bourgeois and proletarian bildungsromans, fail to depict the growth of class consciousness and fail to sustain even the semblance of a “hero”; indeed, they pose a threat to class consciousness since they challenge the telos and essence of class. This failure and threat, though, are the very grounds of the lumpenproletarian novel’s veracity. Despite the refinement of the representation of collective agency that Foley observes in the proletarian novels of Dos Passos or Steinbeck, there is something incoherent about the project of the proletarian novel. The proletarian novel is the *reductio ad absurdum* of the attempt to impute class consciousness, to render of a collection of individuals as a collective subject of history. By
contrast, given that the lumpenproletariat is essentially a random scattering of individuals whose only shared property is the accident of their exclusion from property, even the property of their labor, it is a fitting subject for the novel form.

V. Bottom Dogs: Recognition as Love

Edward Dahlberg’s Bottom Dogs, a series of episodes in the youth of orphan Lorry Lewis, was written on the verge of the Depression in 1928 and published in 1930. At the start of Bottom Dogs, Lorry lives with mother Lizzie, a barber who moves from one Midwest town to another whenever business runs dry or people catch on to the fact she sells bogus therapeutic wares. She and her lover Henry get annoyed and send Lorry to an orphanage. The new home lacks luxury, but Dahlberg avoids pity to make it a place of camaraderie and play. When Lorry gets too old for the orphanage, he drops out of school and gets a job with American Express. Fired unfairly for appearing to skip work, Lorry decides to head out to California “ridin’ the blinds.” When he arrives in L.A., he does not find work, only a new group of peers at the Y.M.C.A. who mirror his old orphanage group in their good-natured, unproductive activity. Throughout the novel, Lorry has longed for sex but without success. In the final chapter, he meets a woman at a club and later loses his virginity.

The claim that Bottom Dogs concerns love and not the denial of love is prima facie implausible. The picaresque, a progress from family to anonymous sex, strays from any stable ideal of love and a fortiori from any successful recognition. Yet what’s at stake is not an ideal of love but a form of love available even to a reject of society. Having been let go, Lorry takes a street car and “feel[s] his limbs slice the cool night air” (125). Between the firing and the street car ride, he encounters a prostitute, who stands as an object of desire and a harbinger of the bottom of the economy to which Lorry will sink. The firing incites desire, which the adolescent
Lorry has noticed “if he hadn’t done well at school or had gotten into trouble…” (124). The precarity of Lorry’s position, far from inspiring the shame that kills lust, awakens it. Lorry requires love: having lost a job, he suddenly cannot provide for himself. Yet that need brings with it lust, and with lust the desire for intimacy, which as much as material benefits is what Lorry has lacked throughout his life. Dahlberg transforms brute need into full-fledged human desire—even something mystical—in a moment of union when Lorry sees the prostitute chatting with a taxi driver: “For a moment his eyes had passed over into her thighs, mouth, and breast” (124). The insertion of an “into” suggests penetration but preempts the image of this woman as a mere object or mere means, for penetration itself becomes strange as the opposition of subject and object is dissolved, as if the eyes had at once merged with the thighs, etc., in oneness rather than wanting. The response, of course, does not reciprocate Lorry’s ecstasy: “She gave him the high sign” (124). This interpellative act of “hailing” interrupts the ecstatic moment of love, calling the latter into question—that is, calling it what it obviously is. The taxi driver as the anonymous third person in the scene threatens to reduce the whole experience to a mere moment of lust. From a complacent position external to this recognitive encounter, only the relation of what Marx and Engels called “naked self-interest…callous ‘cash payment’” obtains (5-6); but for Lorry, this sex is sublimed into love just because it condemns the cash nexus and evades consummation.

A parodied moment of Hegelian freedom—finding oneself in the other—is at the same time bound to a brutal metonymical chain. Dahlberg associates love with sex, sex with whores,

———

23 See Judith Butler’s Giving an Account of Oneself for the suggestion that recognition in the Phenomenology of Spirit is “ecstatic” rather than “imperialist” (27-28). My point, however, is that defamiliarization, a moment prior to recognition, may be ecstatic.
and whores with the venereal disease that will frighten Lorry away: indeed, that distances him from conventional love throughout the novel. But prostitution here is not merely the travesty of love that it is from a bourgeois point of view. The love of which Lorry becomes conscious, or into which he briefly dissolves, is the experience of absolute exclusion from what is normally called love, such that for a moment he is excluded even from himself and from the egoistic relation on which bourgeois love is premised. The defamiliarization at work in meeting the prostitute contradicts the durable relation of love in Hegel’s sense; but it is thereby a critique of the exclusivity of Hegelian love defined in terms of the family that will in turn be assimilated into civil society and state.

This brief encounter with a prostitute shifts the aspect under which one might see all the preceding and succeeding narrative. The encounter denies bourgeois love and makes room for the camaraderie of other boys. The alternative is accessible from within the present social order. It is found in the orphanage school and the Y.M.C.A., not as the “ideological” structures that they are in their “material” practices, but as comprehended under their spiritual aspect, as imbued with love by Lorry and his moneyless friends. Material, following the Marxist tradition, I take to be in the last instance economic. Spiritual I oppose to the economic; it is a way of imagining persons independently of their place in the economic order, and therefore a way of seeing them that acknowledges their ability to live in spite of a lack of economic agency.

Though the bottom dog is hardly a model subject of religion or family or school, it is not “outside” in the sense of living off the grid. It is embedded in class society; but it is outside in the sense of having no property but the soul. Althusser holds that there is a kind of knowing “outside” of ideology: the “subject-less” discourse of “science” (171). Yet for Dahlberg the knowledge embodied in love, not science, is the outside of ideology. Love is possible after the
stages of identification and alienation, Hegelian recognition and Althusserian interpellation, have been negated or passed through; love thus opens onto a new freedom. It is important that Althusser admits only a single counter-example to his claim that all human activity is ideological; this crack in the monolith of his theory threatens to broaden to accommodate other forms of knowledge: not just science but connaissance.

VI. Unjustified and Justified Recognition, or, Interpellation and Recognition

Yet how can I assert that this connaissance of love frees one from the ideology in which statist misrecognition remains mired? Don’t I need a criterion to distinguish between genuine recognition and misrecognition? As I remarked above, we cannot rely on the mimetic plausibility of a recognition modeled on love. Defamiliarization, while a sharpening of perception, is marked by a departure from the plausible, from what is conventionally called verisimilitude. Defamiliarization, rather, opens up a space in which to take up a certain moral stance. But before I elaborate on and recommend this moral stance, this view of recognition, I must first assess Axel Honneth’s account of the difference between misrecognition and recognition. Honneth accepts the demand for a criterion to distinguish between them, acknowledging the Althusserian critique in his essay on “Recognition as Ideology.” Honneth submits the following standard: recognition is justified only if it “lead[s] to modes of behaviour that give real expression to the actual value articulated in the original act” of acknowledgement (I in We 92). Here “real expression” entails a “material element” as opposed, presumably, to a mere symbolic difference or difference of consciousness: Honneth’s example is a new job title for an old job without a corresponding raise (91-92).

A justified change in job title involves, among other things perhaps, an increase in money, but this implies a reaffirmation of the economically stratified status quo for fellow
employees. Would exclusive and invidious forms of material improvement count as justified on Honneth’s account? The criterion of material improvement would perhaps have to work in conjunction with some stipulation of just distribution. It would therefore be necessary to justify recognition with respect to distribution. Indeed, the articulation of the two major forms of justice, distributive and recognitive, is the burden of Honneth’s contribution to his debate with Nancy Fraser, *Redistribution or Recognition?* In this debate, Honneth contends that redistribution is a form of recognition. Yet on his account, distribution is not merely a function of need but merit, a distinction that opens the way to a non-egalitarian account of recognition. An interesting ambiguity in Honneth’s account of the form of recognition implied by the state appears when we compare his *The Struggle for Recognition* to *Redistribution or Recognition?*: in the former, earlier analysis of Hegel, the relationship characterizing the state is one of solidarity underwritten by “symmetrical” esteem for individual, particular value, albeit a symmetry that Honneth admits is not absolutely egalitarian (*Struggle* 129-30). In the latter analysis, the term solidarity drops out in favor of the relationship of esteem for individual accomplishment (*Redistribution* 138-75). The difference is significant, because, according to the account in *Redistribution*, state recognition as esteem is the recognition of merit and is thus necessarily invidious. Esteem for merit is a relationship that endorses the very class distinctions that characterize interpellation. Honneth is aware of this problem, and his answer is that the “equality principle” keeps the invidious tendency of the “achievement principle” in check: the principle of equal rights under the law can be used to claim “a minimum of social status and hence economic resources independently of the meritocratic recognition principle” (*Redistribution* 147). But here redistribution becomes a stopgap for the anti-egalitarian effects of a form of recognition. Honneth attempts to construe redistribution struggles as forms of recognition struggles, but some
forms of recognition that result fall short of egalitarianism. A raise in pay, then, can signify a recognition of individual merit, but Althusser would be happy to concede this recognition is consistent with—indeed identical to—interpellation: it reinforces class distinctions.

In * Redistribution* Honneth construes recognition not along the dichotomy of justified/unjustified but along a continuum: thus recognition can be increased in quantity (144, 186) or quality (174-75). Honneth is admittedly clarifying Hegel’s theory and often avoids inserting his own opinion; therefore his analysis oscillates between description and valorization. For instance, he criticizes the narrowness of Hegel’s concept of the nuclear family as paradigmatic of the relation of love but maintains that Hegel’s account of love nonetheless retains a “surplus of validity”: the principle of love can be claimed by hitherto excluded social groups and individuals in order to demand inclusion (146, 174-75, 186-87). Honneth’s analysis is thus dialectical: he criticizes an ideological example of love, an unjustified recognition (the sort confined to the nuclear family) but sees the potential for justified recognition inherent in the principle of love. The criterion of material improvement, on the other hand, revises Honneth’s continuum in favor of a rigid distinction of justification between forms of acknowledgement that in another context he finds to be dialectically related.

One of the key differences between the recognition I am recommending (recognition that is fundamentally love) and the recognition that Honneth proposes (recognition as love sublated by equality and solidarity), is that Honneth’s struggle for redistribution as recognition, though putatively an “intersubjective” appeal to other people, is also an appeal to what he calls the “capitalist social order.” But this order is in fact an irrelevant object of appeal for those whose only recourse is to mutual aid from concrete others. Honneth is aware that his model of recognition is unavailable to many. It is an ideal only realized in the “realm of actualized
freedom.” As such, it may have a utopian surplus as an inspiration for social struggle. But two considerations qualify its utopian value: First, seeing Honneth’s recognition under its utopian aspect may rather cause dismay and defeatism, not to say resentment, among those denied such recognition and lacking the realistic possibility of attaining it. The mutual recognition of the poor, specifically those beyond any possibility of social prestige, has nothing necessarily to do with envy; mutual aid is an alternative rather than a substitute for status. Second, seeing Honneth’s recognition under its utopian aspect promotes the illusion that the capitalist social order is utopian in the good sense of the word. At the risk of fetishizing a condition of deprivation, I maintain that the condition of the worst-off nonetheless shows the necessity of love comprehending equality and solidarity as alternatives to relationships of prestige and invidious differences of wealth. What I am calling love, then, is a type of recognition that (a) may be mediated solely in metaphorical or symbolic terms; (b) is therefore available to all; yet (c) is not inconsistent with material improvement. It is in fact a precondition for it. But if we follow Honneth in making material improvement a necessary condition of recognition, we consign a great portion of humankind to non-recognition; at the same time, by defining a (spiritual) love as the essence of recognition, we both acknowledge a form of recognition in the hands of the rejects of society themselves and lay the basis for a recognition of material improvement. Further, only if we love others will we have the impetus to engage as equals in acts of solidarity that will improve their status and material situation.

VII. Material, Spiritual, Aesthetic

What would recognition mean if it were not material? I have been opposing the “spiritual” to the “material,” and Judith Butler can represent the familiar consensus of identifying reality with materiality. Butler criticizes the allegedly Cartesian position of psychoanalytic theorist Mladen
Dolar, faulting him for a position that resembles mine: that the reality of “love” is non-material and inassimilable to interpellation. But Dolar, charges Butler, makes the mistake of locating love in an “interior register” within the “pure ideality of the soul,” in contrast to the external and material register of practices (Butler *Psychic* 127). “The failure of interpellation is clearly to be valued,” she concedes, “but to figure that failure in terms that rehabilitate a structure of love outside the domain of the social risks reifying particular social forms of love as eternal psychic facts” (129). Butler does not admit the possibility of psychic facts that are neither social nor eternal, relying instead on the obviousness of the “binary” between social and eternal or between time-bound process and reification. These binaries exclude a third possibility, aesthetic phenomena and the aesthetic power itself. The aesthetic phenomenon of defamiliarization is neither social nor eternal. As “aesthetic” in the sense of attunement to the realm of phenomena, defamiliarization rather calls into question the opposition of social and eternal by showing how both may be evaded. Defamiliarization, though a process that takes place via the medium of language, nonetheless is a process that destroys the pretentions of language to constitute the social or symbolic, to say nothing of commitment to the existence of something eternal. Defamiliarization shocks into strangeness the obviousnesses on which much ontology, whether materialist or Cartesian, depends.

These practices of lumpenproletarian recognition are genuine not just because of their evasion of illusory binaries but because of their engagement with the lumpenproletariat, or humankind *per se*, a reality neither the product of eternity nor society but rather a *practical* stance of those excluded from society *as if* they were ontologically the very opposite of what they were: ends in themselves. My opposition to a strictly “materialist” account of recognition is not an ontological commitment but a moral stance. For Kant, “the concept of the intelligible
world” in which ends in themselves or persons exist is “only a point of view which reason finds itself constrained to adopt outside appearances in order to conceive itself as practical” (Kant 126, emphasis original). This practical stance straddles the divide between inner sense (“psychic fact”) and eternity, determinism and freedom, and is enabled through the antinomian process of aesthetic experience: what Shklovsky conceives as defamiliarization. As Kant puts it in the Critique of Judgment, the aesthetic faculty of “judgment will effect a transition from the pure cognitive power, i.e., from the domain of the concepts of nature, to the domain of the concept of freedom…” (18). Analogously, the moment of defamiliarization enables a transition from the realm of necessity to that of freedom, or the realm of the material to the realm of the spiritual. The judgment enabled by defamiliarization can effect a transition from the misrecognition that characterizes the realm of necessity to the recognition that characterizes the realm of actualized freedom. This realm of actualized freedom, as I suggested as the outset, resembles Althusser’s totality of society much as Wittgenstein’s duck resembles Wittgenstein’s rabbit. But the criterion that distinguishes Althusser’s realm of necessity from Dahlberg’s realm of freedom is the fact that, in contrast to the instrumentalized subjects within the Althusserian state—even the bad subjects who appear to play no role—Bottom Dogs is unabashedly an aggregate of useless subjects. They cannot be used as mere means, as Kant said of humanity, and must be either rejected, ignored, or affirmed—that is, called ends in themselves.

VIII. Recognition and Defamiliarization

In Viktor Shklovsky’s famous formulation, “[A]rt exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony” (12). For Shklovsky, poetic language defamiliarizes, that is, departs from the everyday, the logical, the chronological, or the grammatical. It arrests the “automatism of perception” (22). He stipulates that it is the process of
experience, not the object of experience, that defines the experience of defamiliarization: “The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object: the object is not important” (12). The process of defamiliarization thus seems to bring together the two senses of “aesthetic”—sense experience and art appreciation—in the view of all phenomena as art. The unimportance of the object, however, seems to be a perverse interpretation, for Shklovsky seems interested in Tolstoy’s critique of the practice of flogging. By refusing to give a standard description, Tolstoy’s word choice conveys absurdity and cruelty, the arbitrariness of the sort of political regime under which Shklovsky gingerly theorized. The lack of artfulness in the act of flogging tends to undermine rather than reinforce the artfulness of Tolstoy’s description. And Shklovsky’s dramatic selection of the act suggests, despite his overt stipulation, that the object itself is indeed important. Far from reconciling sense experience and art appreciation, Shklovsky’s defamiliarization wrenches apart the two. Insofar as the object is really perceived, the object cannot be appreciated. Shklovsky insists that in art “the process of perception has become an aesthetic end in itself” (12); in fact he implies that not merely the form (perception) is an end in itself but the content, too. To say that the content is an end in itself recalls Kant’s principle of the treatment of persons as ends in themselves, and indeed it encourages us to posit a “kingdom of ends” as a rival order to the kingdom of necessity that is the history of the organization of human material. Shklovsky’s defamiliarization, far from merely aestheticizing all experience, as it first appears to do, makes all experience ethical: that is, it challenges us to apprehend the “other”—stone, prostitute, etc.—as a person. In some cases, the lumpenproletariat in fact occupies a condition in which the status of humanity as end-in-itself, “something whose existence has in
itself an absolute value” (Kant *Groundwork* 95, emphasis original) stands out most clearly.

According to Patrick Gardiner, Hegel may thus have perceived the Kantian connection between aesthetic and moral relations. Gardiner quotes Hegel: “[T]he contemplation of beauty…leaves objects alone as being inherently free and infinite; there is no wish to possess them or take advantage of them as useful for fulfilling finite needs and intentions” (Hegel qtd. in Gardiner 164). Gardiner suggests “It is almost as if [Hegel] saw here a parallel between the disinterestedness ascribable to the aesthetic outlook and Kant’s insistence in his moral philosophy that we should treat other persons as ends in themselves…” (164).

John McCumber clarifies Hegel’s view on Kant’s second formulation in the *Groundwork* of the categorical imperative. This formulation demands that one “Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end” (Kant *Groundwork* 96, emphasis original). McCumber makes two relevant points. The first is that Hegel’s criticism of the “emptiness” or “mere formalism” of Kant’s categorical imperative, which seems to amount to mere logical algorithms for the avoidance of inconsistency, does not apply in the case of the second formulation (McCumber 164). Yet McCumber goes on to argue that Hegel does not fault Kant for emptiness as such but for giving an insufficient account of the moral law: “…Kant’s problem is not that he has propounded an empty version of the moral law. It is that having formulated the law appropriately, he does not go on and fill it in, because with his non-natural account of will he has separated the moral law from all content by an unbridgeable divide: that between the empirical and the noumenal realms” (McCumber 168). I would argue, however, that, in light of Kant’s point that the imperative depends not on an ontological commitment to a noumenon but on a practical stance towards the empirical appearance of another person, there is no real
contradiction between Hegel and Kant about the second formulation of the categorical imperative. So I treat them in this study as practically in accord.

The paradigm of end-in-itself in *Bottom Dogs* is the orphan without work (Lorry fired from his job) rather than the prostitute. Any person with property, even if only the property of labor, is susceptible to treatment “merely as a means for arbitrary use by this or that will” (Kant *Groundwork* 95, emphasis original). If interpellation hinges on the “subject” being “subjected,” or placed in the service of social institutions, it epitomizes the relationship of mere means. Defamiliarization disrupts this subjection in the process of perceiving a useless thing as a person; it thus mediates between the realms of nature and freedom, not in the metaphysical sense of a passage from phenomenon to noumenon, but in the ethical sense of a change from abjection to respect.

Dahlberg’s scene begins with interpellation—the prostitute’s “high sign”—that is arrested by defamiliarization and followed by a nascent relationship of recognition: a moment of ecstasy or travel outside of the self that opens the possibility of treating the prostitute, quintessentially the mere means for the satisfaction of the self, into an end in herself. Dahlberg foregrounds the “device,” or figure, by presenting the episode with the prostitute in the form of paradox and the rechristening of the cliché of interpellation. Subject and predicate, subject and object, are confused as eyes and thighs fuse. The strangeness of defamiliarization appears here in the simultaneous nearness of the prostitute and her distance from ordinary perception. The cliché arrives in the “high sign,” which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as “any of various gestures or signals (sometimes surreptitious) made with the hand held up, *esp.* one indicating that all is well or that the coast is clear.” But the sex worker’s high sign is a reversal of this sense, a gesture made in front of the taxi driver, a threat to Lorry rather than a signal that all is well. In a
prostitute’s hand high is low and well ill, suggesting that “hailing,” what for Althusser is the model interpellative act, is in the hands of the lumpenproletariat. It is significant that the OED would define a colloquialism with two other colloquial figures: only Dahlberg’s technique frees us from a vicious circle of cliché. Since the high sign is not habitual but exceptional, it is the precondition for a kind of merging with the other, a liberation from fear, that Lorry experiences a moment later on the streetcar: “His eyes passed over completely into all the objects passing before him….” Lorry experiences in defamiliarization not the beginnings but the promise of love: lust becomes regard for the truth of the other as equal to, continuous with, his own being. The other side of Marx’s interpellative list—“alongside ruined and adventurous offshoots of the bourgeoisie”—is the truth that the lumpenproletariat’s lack of class identity prepares it for a political articulation of commonality between self and other. I stress this moment of defamiliarization and recognition because it is the moment that sheds light on—defamiliarizes—not only the moment of the prostitute’s embeddedness in the economic order but also the nonchalance of the boys’ places at the orphanage and Y.M.C.A., allowing one to see these moments under their utopian aspects that cannot reduce to the opposition between the economic and superstructural. Recognition at its most basic is a relationship of camaraderie, which is at its most basic a relationship between two souls.

Kantian respect is conventionally distinct from Hegelian recognition, but the two, I contend, are intimately related. The former is a necessary condition of the latter. The most important difference in this context is the difference between what is for Kant a formal

24 Thanks to John Christman for clarifying the relationship between Kantian respect and Hegelian recognition here. But I do not hold him responsible for my attempt to reconcile Kant and Hegel here.
acknowledgement of personhood or rational agency as such and what is for Hegel the acknowledgement of the particularities of that personhood, the struggles in which the individual is implicated within ethical life. In the fight for recognition in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel writes that the self may find acknowledgement as a mere “person” but cannot be acknowledged as a “self-consciousness” without “staking” his or her life (114). The struggle for recognition means implicating one’s particular life in the lives of other persons, with all of the risks to one’s (material, spiritual) safety that this involves. Yet what does recognition become if one has lost one’s particular life, has become anonymous, and has nothing left to risk? One may answer that the conditions for recognition are simply lacking and be spurred on by Honneth’s “surplus of validity” to instantiate those conditions (*Redistribution* 149-50). I have criticized this interpretation on pragmatic grounds above. On the other hand, however, one may respond in a more hopeful fashion by defamiliarizing the very notion of recognition—and the notion of respect—in such a way that respect becomes a condition of possibility for recognition. An acknowledgement of personhood per se is a precondition for an acknowledgement of the particularities of personhood, just because that acknowledgement leads to the enrichment of the person: personhood develops into self-consciousness. In contrast to the fond portraits of idiosyncrasy lent to Lorry’s comrades at the orphanage, Lorry himself remains undeveloped, the perpetual “Newcumber”; only after the moment of losing his job and encountering the prostitute does he begin to fashion a narrative of his own by going on the road. It is this estranging experience of an object (the prostitute) as person, and Lorry, in turn, as person, that sets the stage for recognition proper: the narrative of the pursuit of individual particularity, the affirmation of which essentially, basically, nakedly, is called love.

25 I owe this point to John Christman.
The encounter with the prostitute comes at the very center of Bottom Dogs, marking the midpoint between the two communities of love irrelevant to history (the state) that Dahlberg depicts: the free time of the orphans and the leisure of the members of the “after Bible coffee class.” The chapters on the orphanage hardly mention the orphanage itself but are devoted to the depiction of individuals outside the classroom itself: “The Newcumber” (Lorry), “Herman Mush Tate,” and “Bonehead-Star-Wolfe.” Likewise, the community of the Y.M.C.A. substitutes for a Sunday morning church service a period of leisure, an amorphous time after Bible coffee class of discussing Nietzsche and playing poker. Dahlberg describes the irrelevant details of each character—diet, literary tastes, past, income (where applicable)—and weaves together small stories of conversation and poker that add up to nothing but the episodes of the book.26 Love in the orphanage or the Y.M.C.A. is attention to each one’s story with disregard for any plot that structures them all together and drives the narrative forward. Yet this drive is something other than either negative or positive freedom. It is not a liberal, negative freedom from external constraint, for the language games of the orphanage and the Y.M.C.A. depend on the interrelationships, the forms of life, of its members; neither is it the Hegelian positive freedom of the actualization of potential within institutions. It repudiates that potential and indeed those institutions in favor of non-state alternatives. The orphanage and the Y.M.C.A. are indeed externally constrained by ISA and capitalist social order, but internally these constitute spheres are insular and separate from these institutions. With respect to their own circles, the subjects of the after Bible coffee class are free.

26 This description of irrelevant detail resembles Giorgio Agamben’s “whatever singularity” as “being such as it is” (Coming Community 1). However, while according with this view of singularity, I do not thereby reject the goal of recognition as Agamben does (85-87).
Though *Bottom Dogs* appears a rambling picaresque, the structure is then a circle: the orphanage, the prostitute, the after Bible coffee class, and the loss of virginity, are a series of moments in a dialectic that refuses progress to curve back upon itself, a circle that excludes the state and represents an alternative to both Althusserian and Hegelian accounts of History. It is a sequence of respect for the end in itself and subsequent recognition of particularity. Dahlberg comes close to romanticizing the lives of the bottom dogs, his novel appearing at the crucial juncture between the era of the freewheeling “hobo” and the desperate “stiff”; yet at the same time he avoids miserabilism or pity. He steers a course between these two forms of sentimentality, observing instead both the aspects of wretchedness and resilience of the orphans and prostitutes he portrays. These two aspects correspond to criticism and affirmation, the criticism through sheer mimesis of a society dependent on the exclusion of bottom dogs and the affirmation, through defamiliarization, of the ability of bottom dogs to hold one another in mutual regard despite their lack of social position. *Bottom Dogs* is a third aspect under which to perceive the picture Hegel and Althusser present—a picture that tends to hold us captive.

**IX. Somebody in Boots: Love as Equality and Solidarity**

In *Somebody in Boots* (1935) Nelson Algren starts from Dahlberg’s assumption of an alternative intimacy but develops these moments of ecstasy further in the direction of praxis itself: Algren goes beyond Dahlberg’s ecstasy and stasis of the soul to present concrete instances of acts of recognition that move from the aesthetic to the material. The development must begin, as in *Bottom Dogs*, by negating the love of family. Thus the partiality and hierarchy of love—two of its essential conditions—are lost from the first. Cass McKay, protagonist of *Somebody in Boots*, flees from home after the brutal, castrating beating his father inflicts on his elder brother Bryan:

---

27 See Kenneth Kusmer, *Down and Out, On the Road* (203).
“Cass’s mind went black and blank; he never remembered leaving the house” (36). He bums his way through the country, returning for a brief period, but escapes again after his father murders a man. Like Lorry, he has become an orphan. He leaves on bad terms with his sister, Nancy, recommending that she become a prostitute. Later this comes true. The course of the book is a sad picaresque, in which Cass, on the road and in and out of jail, seeks some relationship that will replace that of his father and sister. He finds this affection intermittently in the violent approval of Nubby O’Neill, who promises to make Cass a “real white man” if he will only refuse to associate with black men like the Communist Dill Doak. Cass is attracted at once to the radical but class-restricted recognition offered by the Dill Doak—a revolutionary “we” that Cass finds incomprehensible (242)—and, ultimately, to the radical exclusion encouraged by Nubby O’Neill. Cass is drawn to Nubby to fill the blackness and blankness where his father’s love might have been. Nubby’s love appears to be the only successful “recognition” in the book, yet his racism turns the hierarchy and partiality of the family into a radicalized, politicized hierarchy and partiality, a fascism that perverts the potential for recognition among the déclassé.

Lumpenproletarian recognition, thus far, is a truth set in opposition to interpellation or ideology. Yet love seems limited, strictly partial, susceptible to the exclusive fascism of a Nubby O’Neill or the international Communism—the exclusiveness of a revolutionary class—of a Dill Doak. Algren quotes the *Communist Manifesto* on the political volatility of the “dangerous class,” its susceptibility to both revolution and “reactionary intrigue,” making plain how Cass is thrown from Nubby’s racism to Dill’s Communism and back again (Algren 155).

In Cass’s susceptibility to cooptation by an entire continuum of political positions, *Somebody in Boots* seems to confirm Marx and Engels’s assessment of the indeterminate ideology of the lumpenproletariat. A follower of Bakunin could also find support in the narrative
Algren offers, for Bakunin, too, recognizes the political uncertainty of this group. Yet Algren’s narrative undermines the common premise of both socialists: that the lumpenproletariat is either Left or Right. Despite the vicissitudes of his protagonist, Algren finally commits to the classlessness of love but decisively rejects any socialist program. In a final section epigraph, Algren quotes the manifesto as anticipating the “association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (233). This coincidence of individuality and universality would fulfil at once the hope of the latter stages of recognition (equality, solidarity) but forgets the first, fundamental stage. Algren tears the two passages, lumpenproletarian and utopian, pre-political and postrevolutionary, out of the dialectic of the manifesto and sets them in paradoxical juxtaposition.\(^{28}\) Lumpenproletariat and utopia cannot be assimilated into the manifesto’s “scientific socialism.”\(^{29}\) The insertion of text from the *Manifesto* into the narrative defamiliarizes the rhetoric of manifesto, adducing a contradiction and a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* of the Communist position to which the lumpenproletariat is susceptible.

**X. The Jungle and the Boxcar**

The tropic picaresque of *Somebody in Boots* travels from irony to synecdoche to mere metonym. The story of the lumpenproletariat, the ironic double of the history of the proletariat, itself becomes miniaturized in the synecdoche of the jungle camp then associated with the mere metonym of riding the rails in a boxcar. Thus Algren reduces solidarity (the lumpenproletariat)

\(^{28}\) I take the opposition of dialectic and paradox from Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ.*

\(^{29}\) Cf. Fredric Jameson’s figure of “a Utopian leap, between our empirical present and the Utopian arrangements of this imaginary future” (*Archaeologies* 147; see also 85-86).
to equality (the jungle) and then to love (the boxcar) through a series of tropes that thus remake our image of recognition as fundamentally ethical rather than political.

As an alternative to the family, civil society, and State, Algren represents the Santa Fé “jungle” of hobos as a kind of loose community of recognition. Cass has grown up around Latinos and, as his relationship with Nubby will reveal, shares their perceived lack of “whiteness.” He feels accepted by the hobos. The “strong ‘we’-feeling among these men and boys” contrasts with the feeling of “them” within the working and middle classes. “In judging a man, Cass learned, the larger question was not whether the man was black, white, or brown—it was whether he was a transient or ‘One of them “inside” folks.’ Inside of a house that was to imply” (18). Yet being inside a house is a mere accident of social privilege, not essential to the identity of any individual. Accordingly, Cass, though he belongs to a ramshackle home, is judged acceptable. The jungle camp is a model of association that gives an ethical articulation to what in Dahlberg is the camaraderie of orphanage and Y.M.C.A.

Cass, raised in the racist world outside of the hobo jungle and distrustful of African Americans, accidentally locks the hatch of a boxcar he enters, drops down to find himself trapped with a young black man and a white woman who subsequently gives birth. In a horrific slapstick moment, Cass has landed on top of the pregnant woman. He has no choice but to help the man aid the woman deliver a child whom he has just aborted. The black man says “Take her head, I’ve got her feet,” and they share the labor with the woman (112). During the labor the man repeatedly calls for a light, so Cass nicknames him “Matches.” Matches is black, and the woman, based on all earlier experience, cannot but be perceived as a “whore”—any woman on the fritz without a man. The child is stillborn, a near-unrecognizable mass of tissue that “looked like nothing so much as a length of pink sausage at first” (114). Cass thinks bizarre violence:
“Holding it awkwardly…Cass felt that he held so much filth. He had a crazy desire to touch the small flame to the thing, to stomp it down into the cracks of the flooring, into the darkness there. He wrapped it in a wet newspaper instead, and he laid it down in the corner” (113). But the logic of this violent desire is in fact moral, for “now he could feel nothing save his own utter weariness and his own great guilt,” having inadvertently ended the child’s life (116). Cass cannot just rid himself of the child, for he has seen himself in that filth; he must take the dead baby with him in an “unnatural parade” out of the boxcar with Matches and the woman when the brakeman opens the hatch (116). The unnaturalness is not the Hegelian supersession of nature; in this parade quite the opposite of prestige is at stake. The act of carrying the child, though forced, guilt-ridden, humiliating, and pointless, confers personhood and thus counts as a strange kind of love.

In the darkness and anonymity of the boxcar partiality is impossible and identity indistinct; Cass, Matches, and the woman merge in a shared situation. In one sense, this indistinction gives insight into the shared situation of the three despite their different subject positions; darkness as a trope of racial difference covers everyone, thus eliding difference, or else, in a defamiliarization of the white man as paradigm of the human, ascribing blackness to everyone in the boxcar. The light reintroduces differences: barriers of gender and race coincide with mutual aid. The name Matches suggests both a doubling between white and black, a matched pair whose relationship is based on shared situation, and a difference introduced in the presence of the light. The name illumines two dimensions of recognition, worth and truth, particularity and sameness, and the nickname sticks with the paradox of the two—it does not, as in the dialectic, progress from unique worth to same truth. The matches, and the doubling name Matches, shed light on the lack of solidarity between Cass and the black man. Cass can confer on him a joking name, the metaphor of a thing or a mere means, without asking his real one.
Meanwhile, the woman does not speak but only labors and babbles (115). Though all three are socio-economically down on their luck, Cass is the only one with the full power of speech and interiority. The exigency of interiority that is lost in Dahlberg is thus reconstituted in Algren. After the brakeman releases the three from the car, the respective positions of Cass and the three clarify in a more nuanced way than a usual hierarchy of gender or race: “There in the silent depot west of Ysleta they stood looking down at the suffering woman. The scar tissue on her throat had turned to a pasty gray. ‘It’s longer than mine, but mine went deeper,’ Cass mused, holding the dead infant in one hand and tracing his own scar with the other” (116). What is emphasized here is not magnitude but particularity of suffering: length versus depth; the guilt-ridden relief of having gotten rid of the thing versus the reluctant burden of still carrying the person. And the capacity to name does not rest with Cass alone: Matches calls him “clown” even as he invites him to flee together (117). But the scar, the “thing” (dead child), the names are all vexed figures of lumpenproletarian love: these images make relationships strange, they acknowledge the particularity of identity without foreclosing or encompassing it, leaving the origin, the depth, of the scar unexplored, but they finally affirm, despite this defamiliarizing intersectionality, a kind of mutual regard.

They share love in their labor despite the differences of the position, role, and intensity of that labor, and despite the death of the child; they have equality despite differences of names and scars; they have love despite the fact that the family is absent or negated—precisely because of the negation of the family. The boxcar is a transient home. While in Bottom Dogs love begins as lust for a whore, Somebody in Boots develops love into a scene of a whore giving birth. There is no doctor, nor father, just three humans with various subject positions who—momentarily—

30 But compare the very difference experience of the gang rape in a different boxcar (94).
share solidarity and common ends: ends in themselves. The darkness and light show different moments of recognition or cognitive love, not some ultimate truth. The rich particularities of individual persons that Dahlberg presents is complemented by the anonymity that Algren develops. The concept—or non-concept, a possibility I will consider below—of the lumpenproletariat as aggregate is consistent with both particularity and indistinction, heterogeneity and commonality. Perhaps the marriage, or tension between, these oppositions is a fair concept of love.

The lumpenproletarian novel in the hands of Dahlberg and Algren provides a model of recognition alternative to both Althusser’s and Honneth’s. I have said recognition is instantiated in acts rather than practices, since the lumpenproletarian novel does not give some “theoretical” account of the process of recognition but more moments of recognition that defamiliarize the ordinary, institutional acts of recognition. If the lumpenproletarian novel is at all ethically important for recognition theory, it is as a kind of via negativa that images cases in which recognition is possible in the absence of any material resources. But this is only the negative sense of lumpenproletarian recognition. Positively, this via negativa suggests that the ISA is not inevitable, either theoretically or practically. The hold of the ISA is not total, but to the extent that it does hold, it can be loosened through the aesthetic experience of defamiliarization. The lumpenproletarian novel thus frees us up to imagine ethics within a realm of freedom.

Recognition is reproduced in a twofold way in the lumpenproletarian novel: it is represented in concrete instances in the narrative and it is (hopefully) imitated outside the narrative as one allows the lumpenproletarian model to transform one’s life in its image. This twofold reproduction is implicit in one of Hegel’s remarks on these concrete instances that are “unique and single”: “The universal and absolute need out of which art…arises has its source in
the fact that man is a \textit{thinking} consciousness, i.e. that he draws out of himself, and makes explicit \textit{for himself}, that which he is, and, generally, whatever is. The things of nature are only \textit{immediate and single}, but man as mind \textit{reduplicates} himself, thinks himself, and only thus is active self-realizedness” (35). The process of reduplication is mimesis at the level of the artwork and imitation at the level of life. This process, which brings together the representation of the empirical world with the practical stance of morality, is in fact an indication of the reconciliation to which Kant’s aesthetic strove.

\textbf{XI. The Lumpenproletariat}

“Lumpenproletariat” is not a name for another agent of history. The lumpenproletariat does not belong within history: in fact it is wrong to reify it at all. The word “lumpenproletariat” just collects together some metonyms of society’s rejects who lack even the commonality of labor. The word lumpenproletariat was a term of disparagement for Marx and a term that sociologists do not use. If even the term “concept” is that which confers unity on a manifold of phenomena, “lumpenproletariat” should not even count as a concept. It is a non-entity, not only in the sense that it counts for nothing, but also in the sense that “lumpenproletarian” is only an aesthetic-ethical aspect under which any human being can be viewed. This aspect is the lack of any use value; a person per se cannot be treated as a means at all and must either be rejected wholly or else loved as an end in itself. “Lumpenproletariat” designates this necessity and this freedom.

The long-acknowledged obsolescence of the working class as “agent of history” may make the idea of an aggregate as a stand-in for such an agent appear more relevant to the left today. Indeed, this imputation of agency on the aggregate is precisely the project of Michael
Hardt and Antonio Negri.\textsuperscript{31} Though they remain committed to a class analysis (\textit{Multitude} 101),\textsuperscript{32} they attempt to substitute for a coherent agent of history an aggregate: the “multitude.” The multitude denotes “all those who are subordinated to, exploited by, and produce under the rule of capital” (\textit{Empire} 256). Yet they hope for a “new materialist teleology” to determine the multitude as “subject” of “cosmopolitical liberation” (\textit{Empire} 64). What is the cement that will hold this subject together? It is “an immanent desire that organizes the multitude” (\textit{Empire} 66). Thus the imputation of desire, which is presumably “material” and thus inscribed in the nature of the multitude, replaces the dubious Lukácsian imputation of an epiphenomenal consciousness as the means of organizing the revolutionary agent. It is crucial that the desire be understood as singular (one immanent desire) and that it be imputed; otherwise, how could one speak of a single desire among the multiplicity of empirical desires? The notions of aggregate and unified agency are incompatible. In any case, whether or not Hardt and Negri’s notion of multitude is coherent, the concept of History, of “Empire” that is its dialectical correlate commits their theory to an entente with History itself rather than the radical utopian alternative, the break with History, that the lumpenproletariat offers.

\footnote{31}{Here I want to acknowledge the importance of the content as well as the structure of \textit{Empire}: as in the conclusions to chapters in Hardt and Negri’s book, the end of the present and chapter and the following chapter spotlights an instance of radical praxis: in this case, it is the Catholic Worker; in the following chapter, it is the I.W.W.}

\footnote{32}{The authors qualify their position by claiming that their emphasis on class is in part a corrective to a recent (at the time of \textit{Multitude}’s publication in 2004) emphasis on recognitive issues (\textit{Multitude} 101).}
Yet if the lumpenproletariat avoids replicating the agent and ally of History in its (neo)Marxian form, perhaps it resembles too much the agent of History that Giorgio Agamben calls “bare life.” Bare life has its origins in the classical legal entity of a being who can “be killed but not sacrificed,” and thus has the paradoxical status of being held sacred by the polis but able to be killed the “sovereign,” much as, in modern society, an individual may be subjected to the “legitimate violence” of the state yet be protected by a doctrine of the “sanctity of life.”

Agamben asserts that politics begins with the sovereign decision that creates bare life by authorizing the use of deadly force against anyone (*Homo Sacer* 83). The significance of bare life, then, the degree zero of human being, is thus its relationship to the state or sovereignty as the site of the constitution of the state’s or sovereignty’s power: in Carl Schmitt’s term, this site is the “state of exception.” Everyone has the status of bare life, is potentially *homo sacer*, in his or her relationship to state power. Bare life thus stands as both the “originary political element” (*Homo Sacer* 88) of Agamben’s account of politics. However, bare life also stands in Agamben’s philosophy of history as a telos for history, albeit the Kojèvian end of history that has already been reached (*The Open* 76). With this admission of an already-realized teleology, however, Agamben’s account becomes murky. There is no longer any telos before us nor any “historical tasks” for humankind. Agamben resorts ironically to Sartrean language to coerce his reader into a certain acknowledgement of this point: “…it is clear for anyone who is not in absolutely bad faith that there are no longer historical tasks that can be taken on by, or even simply assigned to, men” (*The Open* 76). Yet this strident denial of telos is odd—who among Agamben’s post-humanist readers needs convincing of this point? The denial is itself a sign of bad faith insofar as it serves as a smoke screen for the telos that Agamben finally places before his readers: “there is nothing left but the depoliticization of human societies by means of the unconditioned unfolding
of the *oikonomia*, or the taking on of biological life itself as the supreme political (or rather impolitical) task” (*The Open* 76). Agamben must first deny task, telos, and attendant agent of history (“a people” [*The Open* 75]) in order to reinsert bare life as a truly final agent of history.

Agamben’s philosophy of history becomes, despite his literal denial and ironic affirmation, a reworking of (the Kojèveian) Hegel, with an updating of agent of history, ineluctable historical progress, classless society, the end of politics. Agamben proposes a new politics that will make bare life coextensive with humanity (*Homo Sacer* 188); and thus he predicts that “the civil war that divides every people” will cease (*Homo Sacer* 178). With the end of politics—Agamben’s cognate to Hegel’s end of history—the “classless society” will be achieved (*Homo Sacer* 178). Here the trope of absorption into the universal class, the proletarianization of humanity, is appropriated from Marx and repeated in a form palatable for a postsocialist condition; the historical process is different but the trope of change and the telos of classlessness remains the same. The fantasy of Marxist and anarchist alike, that the lumpenproletariat would disappear as soon as it is recognized, is the same as Agamben’s fantasy of bare life which, having entered a universal “zone of indistinction,” no longer appears under a “sovereign ban” but is liberated from sovereignty: no more classes, no more state. The lumpenproletariat, rather, parodies both proletariat and bare life in its immanent classlessness, which amounts to the same thing as denying the possibility of a true classless society. So the lumpenproletariat stands resolutely opposed to any recognition that would make humankind a zone of indistinction. “Zone of indistinction” being Agamben’s key deconstructive concept, he asserts that, since sovereignty as such is constituted by a (de)valuation of bare life, democracy and totalitarianism become indistinguishable: “Once their fundamental referent becomes bare life, traditional political distinctions (such as those between Right and Left, liberalism and
totalitarianism, private and public) lose their clarity and intelligibility and enter into a zone of indistinction” (*Homo Sacer* 122). While this concept of indistinction effects a massive homogenization analogous to the concept of “multitude” (in which difference is not part of the mechanism), only the simultaneous emphasis on uniqueness and identity between self and other that characterizes the lumpenproletariat can maintain a full-fledged account of recognition that does not founder on either identity or difference. Appeals to History—whether that is Empire in the sense of Hardt and Negri or the “end of history” that Agamben derives from Hegel, via Kojève—tend to swallow up concrete acts of praxis—love—within grand determinisms.

The coarse lumpenproletarian demand for love is not programmatic: it may take the form of charity; it may take the form of participation in socio-economic change; but it must necessarily take the form of recognition immanent to the lumpenproletariat: that of love. It is tempting to dismiss attempts to relieve suffering, in contrast to the attempts to create classless society, as paternalism. But it is not paternalism to pattern one’s response to the lumpenproletariat—and persons in general—after the strange kind of love that exists within the lumpenproletariat. This is the love that takes into account both dimensions of recognition: the worth of uniqueness and the truth of shared identity without any attempt to reconcile the two. In love only does the lumpenproletariat have agency. This agency does not effect dialectical progress but simply does not move on. The lumpenproletariat, then, is no agent of history, in the venerable tradition from the bourgeoisie to *homo sacer*: it is either a disintegrated mass or a coalition of love, of which the jungle, the street, the boxcar, or the Occupy Movement, or the protests in Ferguson, or the Black Lives Matter Movement and its vexed relationship to the

---

33 See Agamben’s *The Open* (e.g. 7, 10, 76).
Bernie Sanders campaign, or houses of hospitality like the Catholic Worker, provide examples. These are examples that call for imitation: in this way the lumpenproletariat attains agency.

In conclusion, I would like to explore the ambiguity of the praxis exemplified in the houses of hospitality and farms of the Catholic Worker as examples of the kind of recognition love that I have been sketching at the two poles of critical theory and proletarian novel. I take the Catholic Worker movement to be a site in which the abstractions of critical theory and the imaginings of the novel take real form. According to co-founder (with Peter Maurin) Dorothy Day, the Catholic Worker, a network of “houses of hospitality” that feed and provide shelter for the homeless and poor as well as a paper called The Catholic Worker sold at one cent a copy, was dedicated from the beginning to “works of mercy, as the most direct form of action. ‘Direct action’ is a slogan of old-time radicals,” Day notes, recalling the everyday and revolutionary praxis of the I.W.W. (Loaves xvii). The Catholic Worker originated in the early and worst part of the Depression, the first copies of The Catholic Worker sold May Day 1933 (Loaves 17). This was the moment cited above in which the truth of the proletariat seemed to be the unemployed, in the sense that the fate of the working class was at stake in the crisis of unemployment.

The example of the Catholic Worker demonstrates that calling love an instance of a radically alternative praxis is not sentimentality or romanticism. Just as the love of a prostitute is a reproach to exclusionary love of bourgeois society, so the love of the Catholic Worker is an affirmation of a sort of love that does not merely call into question forms of bourgeois recognition but provides an alternative to it. Neither is the Catholic Worker romantic in its revolutionary hope. The vision of the Catholic Worker was that of isolated communities of resources and recognition that sought to impact society as a whole, yet that saw such an impact as improbable. In Peter Maurin’s words, “My whole scheme is a Utopian, Christian communism.
I am not afraid of the word communism. I am not saying that my program is for everyone. It is for those who choose to embrace it” (qtd. in Day Loaves 23). Ironically, a Christian communism, which one would expect to draw on eschatological hope, is less hopeful about social change than its contemporary secular Communism. Indeed, Day opts unfortunately for a straightforward reading of the doctrine that “the poor will always be with us” rather than find poverty contingent on specific social structures (Loaves 74). Yet in the face of Day’s enduring commitment to direct action out of love for the “neighbor,” matters of eschatology may make little practical difference. The situation may be different, however, when we turn from the small-scale communal love of the Catholic Worker to efforts for large-scale, systemic solidarity—the moment of direct action(s) when equality and solidarity are caught up in hope of a radically better future in which poverty no longer exists. The exigencies of this situation, and the condition of possibility of that hope, will be knowledge that that eschaton is on its way.

XII. Love, Wherever Form is Found

I began with the claim that a portrayal of the passage from interpellation to recognition via defamiliarization would loosen the grip of the theory, and the very efficacy of the practice, of interpellation, whether of the Althusserian or Hegelian variety. Dahlberg helps us to imagine a social sphere independent of history in both the Althusserian and Hegelian sense (the two histories that are finally identical). The circular structure of Bottom Dogs resembles a utopia insofar as a utopia is defined by its detachment from history, or the development of the state and its apparatuses. Within this circle the subject is free.

In an important sense it is perverse to model a theory of recognition on a condition of deprivation. A radical recognition found in the lumpenproletariat is in a sense, like Adorno’s “coarsest demand: that no-one shall go hungry any more,” the only image of classless society
available in a “utopia” surrounded by the realm of necessity (Minima Moralia 156). The lumpenproletarian novel is a “tarrying with the negative” implicit in the complacent bourgeois utopia of the 1890s, insofar as that utopia was an all-too-easy attempt to extend the benefits of a liberal middle class recognition to everyone. The lumpenproletariat is the principle of the necessary exclusions—racialized, declassed, and gendered—implicit in that utopian complacency. But the lumpenproletariat attests to these exclusions and thereby protests against them; it endures despite these exclusions and thereby offers alternatives to them.

The danger of fetishizing the classless “utopian” immiseration of the lumpenproletariat might be tempered by the perspective of Gustavo Gutiérrez, who argues that an affirmation of poverty means a protest against poverty as well as a stance of solidarity with the poor (171-73). Just as Lorry moves from familiarity to a strange recognition, Dahlberg’s novel might shock one into a fresh respect for the bottom dogs of society, hitherto taken for subordinates of the ISA or victims of the capitalist social order, and open the way for the imagination of practices of love that might serve as alternatives to the progress narrative, or Althusser’s stasis narrative, of family, civil society, and state. This recognition—a practical stance that is available in the absence of the possibility of material amelioration—is finally consistent with material amelioration. Indeed, it is a precondition for it. Only if we affirm socially useless persons as ends in themselves, as part of a community of ends, can we have any moral impetus to work in solidarity with them to strive for material improvement. To imagine a recognition as essentially non-material is not to ignore the material causes or solutions to non-recognition. Thus “mutual aid,” mentioned above in the context of symbolic struggle, can and should lead to material struggle as well. This sense of recognition is both utopian (egalitarian) and practical (the application of egalitarianism to practice). A spiritual stance towards recognition, a recognition
proper to those who do not even have the property of their labor, is a precondition for any struggle for acknowledgement in the form of material things.

Defamiliarization is thankfully not confined to art: “I personally feel,” writes Shklovsky, “that defamiliarization is found almost everywhere form is found” (18). Form, or emplotment of the chaos of life, is characteristic of experience as such. Whenever stories of the worst-off of society take on plot and occupy a place in our life, they may be defamiliarized and seen as something other than things subsumed by the capitalist social order and the ideological state apparatus. A novel by Dahlberg is only a shock or a shove to take part in these relationships of love. We can read about the bottom dogs of society, but we can only know them as humans through one-on-one relationships that will take a utopian imagination to produce. These relationships are intrinsically important. They are also preconditions for the project of equality and solidarity: of organizing despite capitalism and state towards spiritual and material goals. However, love on its own is partial and incomplete, a reversal of the universality of utopianism and a despair about the possibilities of radical change.
Chapter 4. The Radical Novel: Utopian and Scientific

So far my argument has mirrored to a certain extent Axel Honneth’s Hegelian stages of recognition. If Hegel’s theory of recognition arrives at the “realm of actualized freedom” that is the bourgeois state, the socialist theory of recognition proposed here takes its starting point Hegel’s realm of freedom, but, like Althusser, finds it rather a realm of necessity. A socialist theory of recognition begins with Hegel’s state and negates it with a utopian break. Robert Owen, Saint-Simon, and Charles Fourier were socialists who both preserved and negated their bourgeois origins. Likewise, Edward Bellamy, William Dean Howells, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman proposed essentially bourgeois utopias—inspired by the middle class and modeled (as critics have often noted) on the quality of life available to the bourgeoisie of their times. And for the bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century, at least on Marx’s account, the essential moment of recognition was neither love nor solidarity but equality. Privatizing love, the family stepped out of the marketplace and state, leaving them to their freedom; and the state facilitated free trade, acting as “but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie” (Communist Manifesto 5). Thus equality is the essential moment of bourgeois recognition: the moment with which a radical recognition of love—and now, as I shall show in this chapter—love’s political extension, solidarity, begins.34

In the radical novel, utopia always strives towards a completed form, whether that be in equality, or love, or (as in the present chapter), solidarity. On the one hand, the form is not totality; on the other hand, as utopia the form strives towards totality in the sense of a

34 I am thinking here of Terry Eagleton’s definition of the Christian notion of agape as “political love” (Holy Terror 30-31).
reconciliation of the alienated subject with its world. As a picture, not of the arrival at the end of
the history or a consummation of the dialectic, a utopian or a proletarian novel carries with it a
charge to instantiate the just, classless society, but each of its attempts, like each stage along the
way of the Phenomenology, proves inadequate. Articulated together they may each be seen under
the aspect of radicalism with its strife towards totality, but the principle of this totality is not
synthesis but what Laclau and Mouffe call articulation or, to use their phrase that avoids
reification, “an articulatory practice which constitutes and organizes social relations”
(Hegemony 96). “Articulation” has a double sense of (a) explicating and announcing some
proposition for the first time and (b) joining together elements that a moment before are thought
to be mutually exclusive, such as class-based and identity-based movements, or scientific and
utopian socialism, a politics of equality and an ethics of love, or the antithetical essences of two
genres. Yet I will call all of these articulations—practical, ideological, literary, etc.—instances of
solidarity. Solidarity is the relationship that is possible in lieu of reconciliation; and indeed it is
the right, the only salutary, relationship lest one fall into the trap of what Adorno calls, in his
critique of Lukács, “reconciliation under duress”—imaging the end of antagonism
(“Reconciliation”). I want to echo Laclau and Mouffe’s contention that antagonism—the friction
between coalitional movements for democracy fully as much as the rivalry between dominant
and emergent hegemonies—is “the very condition of possibility” of “a pluralist democratic
politics” (Hegemony xvii-xviii). Yet solidarity is a term that strikes a balance between a
complete indifference of pluralism and a monolithic totalitarianism. My model for this balance of
decentralization and centralization—terms I will explore below—is the I.W.W.

Love is not the nascent form of recognition that it is for bourgeois society; it signifies in
the proletarian novel the dissolution of the institutions that support recognition in society. The
utopian novel celebrates a kind of consummation of the hopes of bourgeois society and the (lumpen)proletarian novel emerges from the failure of that utopian form and theme. The literature of the lumpenproletariat attests the utopian principle of universality, only in its anonymous affirmations of particularity, its powerless practices, its classlessness without hope of a true future classless society. This literature, then, is a thematic “advance” over the utopian novel, for it accommodates an intersectionality critique, a recognition of difference, yet without any accompanying redemption of that difference. It has lost the substance of hope. If its desperate practices and recalcitrant scandal attest to radicalism, this is only a hopeless radicalism. The Catholic Worker, with its practices patterned after the now-vanished vestiges of eschatological hope, is the paradigm of hopeless radicalism.

What truth, however, has emerged from this tarrying with the negative of the utopian and proletarian novels? Above I established that the truth to which both literature and philosophy attests is the truth of recognition, or the truth of a resolved contradiction on the verge of new contradiction. The truth of the utopian novel, then, is the truth of the resolution of the contradiction between egalitarianism and recognition—a resolution that in turn proves to be false in its universality yet open to the possibility of a true universality. That true universality was found in a love that, jettisoning an essential and false (yet precious as a regulatory ideal) human identity on which equality is premised, promises rather an anonymous mutual regard for this or that lumpenproletarian that sets itself against the particularity of a liberal utopian equality for the proud autonomous individual. Yet the lumpenproletariat has its own autonomy via an affirmation of alternative values and practices. The truth of the lumpenproletarian novel, demonstrated in the propositional and the narrative sense, is the truth of a freedom of alternative practices. Yet those practices as yet lack any radical content. If the lumpenproletarian novel sets itself against
interpellation in the name of some spiritual recognition, against the ideology of illusory practices in favor of an alternative kind of consciousness, its alternative does not yet engage in revolutionary practices: lumpenproletarian recognition, though a true egalitarian recognition, loving recognition, is hollow with respect to radicalism. If it is a condition of radicalism, it is only a precondition. But, as I will argue below, a rereading and articulation of the radical aspects of both the utopian and proletarian novels can combine post-revolutionary society with efficacious revolutionary practice, achievement with hope.

It is worth commenting on what drives this dialectic towards truth—and, ultimately, towards justice—forward; otherwise it seems we are caught between Engels’s teleological determinism of history and utopianism’s arbitrary break with that determinism. For Hegel, it is axiomatic that history moves in the direction of truth and justice, in accordance with the movement of reason itself. That movement is a function of the nature of logic itself, for, if nothing is self-identical, everything contains a contradiction. And if a self-contradictory thing is impossible, that thing is impelled towards resolution. It seems to follow, then, that, as we have found, things (propositions, stories) drive towards truth. Yet it does not follow that that truth will be good or just. As Robert R. Williams argues, the “Phenomenology is a self-accomplishing skepticism that shows that all shapes of consciousness are self-subverting” (2). For Williams, skepticism or approach to the true does not ensure arrival at the just. Hegel’s account in the Phenomenology seems committed to the view that the true, but not necessarily the good, will prevail. Neither does the Elements of the Philosophy of Right have to be read in this optimistic way. The former text, to be sure, proclaims the state to be “inherently rational”: Hegel declares that “This treatise, therefore, in so far as it deals with political science, shall be nothing other than an attempt to comprehend and portray the state as an inherently rational entity” (21,
emphasis original). He distinguishes this judgment of rationality from a judgment of goodness, however, for “as a philosophical composition, it [the Philosophy of Right] must distance itself as far as possible from the obligation to construct a state as it ought to be” (21, emphasis original). The implication is that there is a difference between the rationality and the goodness of the state, and the limits of the philosophy is to affirm the rationality of the state.

I appropriate Hegel, not to read him “with the grain” nor “against the grain” but to exploit problems in his Elements of the Philosophy of Right, the problem of the rabble and the tension between the rationality and goodness of society, in order to open the way for a socialist version of structures of recognition. But Bloom’s sense of “misreading” is dangerous if it suggests a supersession of Hegel, some wrestling with and triumph over a predecessor. (This would amount to hubris if not psychosis.) At the same time, it is an axiom of this study that socialism is indeed progress over bourgeois society, and in this sense it does not challenge but breaks with certain elements of the Philosophy of Right.

By employing Hegel in a utopian dialectic, I want to reject both the view that history is ruled by logical necessity and that there is necessarily anything intrinsically good (but it might contingently turn out to be good) in the tendency of history. Rather, my utopian doctrine attributes a certain coherence to history and my theory of genre concludes against reification that the good is no product of history itself but rather of an alternative history (or just call it a story) available in literature and praxis that occasionally intervenes in “History” in the Marxist sense. This rapprochement of utopianism and Marxism, an aleatory story and a necessary history, finds coherence in literary history without reification, method without scientific pretensions to adequation: it is a rereading of history (literary history, economic history; spiritual and material history) that uses Hegel to make a coherent method out of the tradition of socialist writing and
the criticism that it inspires. The dialectic of the radical novel, an articulation of the foregoing
generic studies that opens the way for further inquiries into genre, develops an *epistemology of
praxis*, where praxis includes both organizing and research program. Thus far the epistemology
of this dissertation has been strictly “theoretical”: at the nexus between literature and philosophy,
one finds the truth of story and argument. Yet if the name of this truth is recognition—the
personal encounter between two or more interlocutors, the dialogue or dialectic—then ultimately
truth is practical, theory a matter of praxis.

As the intersection of story and history; freedom and necessity; past, present, and future;
the radical novel is the name for the opposition between the forms of socialism with which I
have been struggling from the beginning of this study. Although the radical novel’s truth can be
expressed in propositional or narratological form, the radical novel’s truth is essentially practical.
That is, praxis is the convergence of argument and story, the opposition that the utopian tradition
from Plato to Hegel has found definitive of human life. Praxis is finally the nexus between utopia
and revolution, ideal society and organizing because, as I will argue below, organizing just is a
vision of utopia, or, it is already the classless society here and now.

I. *Epistemology of Praxis*

The utopian-socialist novel has provided an image of the classless society that transcends
invidious economic distinctions but not a hierarchy of race and gender or dominant and subaltern
status. The (lumpen)proletarian novel has provided a negative image of that classless society,
which strays from the exclusivity and invidious nature of the utopian novel because its aggregate
levels all distinction. Yet in the lumpenproletarian novel universality has been preserved as
surely as its heterogeneity, its all-inclusiveness has been asserted. The socialist tradition of
writing appears fragmented, in shambles, yet we may articulate the two in a “determinate negation,” where the novels of socialism—those whose representations strive towards the unrepresented because unknown society, the classless society—in a way that gives coherence to the whole tradition. Call that tradition the radical novel, which appears in both “utopian” and “scientific” (Marxist) forms. If the utopian novel develops out of the dialectic of the “bourgeois” novel and the proletarian out of the dialectic of the utopian novel, so the radical novel is the name for a dialectic that comprehends the whole of literary history—“bourgeois,” “proletarian,” “utopian”—just because it draws on the past and present, is structured around the moment of revolution, and strives towards a classless society.

In the socialist tradition, the classless society is either a vague hope (for Marxism) or a confident blueprint (for utopianism). Ernst Bloch is a counter-example to this dichotomy, as he tries in his *The Principle of Hope* to maintain both Marxist and utopian commitments at the same time. Hope, however, is the principle that unites the two traditions, and for Bloch as for Engels Marxism is a sublation and a fulfilment of the dreams of the utopians: indeed, it is the fulfillment of dreaming in general. It might be observed that Bloch already knew what socialism looked like, because, as Tom Moylan observes, the Soviet Union was the instantiation of socialism (Moylan cited in Jameson *Archaeologies* 3, note 3). An imaginative blueprint was not necessary. In this sense, Bloch’s view of utopia is at once too determinate and too hazy: too determinate in its identification with the U.S.S.R., and too indeterminate in identifying all sorts of phenomena, all manifestations of hope, with signs of the “Novum.” A cluster of interrelated concepts provides his philosophy of the future with a redundancy that builds a bridge from the banalities of the present bourgeois society (including everything from folklore to Hollywood) to the wish-fulfillment of socialist society characteristic of a William Morris (whose “nowhere”
comprehends the end of psychological disorders, sexual frustrations, and the pain of old age). These concepts include “hope,” “utopia,” “Novum,” “not-yet-being,” etc. The latter two substitute metaphysical commitment from fantasy, because “not-yet-being” really exists. I call this commitment metaphysical because “not-yet” entities necessarily elude empirical observation; they are only detectable through allusion and prefiguration. Bloch’s metaphysics of the future thus introduces a puzzle into his philosophy of the future, for it now appears that Moylan is incorrect to say that the Soviet Union functions as his “utopia.” The Soviet Union is actually that Wittgensteinian wheel that turns but engages nothing else within Bloch’s system. His support for the U.S.S.R. is an alien imposition that must be jettisoned in order that his utopian thinking can be maintained. So it is incorrect to say that Bloch’s utopianism is properly speaking an apologetics for Soviet-style socialism; yet, since Bloch lacks this “actually-existing” utopia, Bloch lacks the very empirical content that would define utopia in opposition to any “other”: distinguish it, that is, from revolutionary struggle or present-day banality. If, then, Bloch defines Soviet socialism as a “concrete utopia,” he sells his own philosophy short, even according to Lenin’s standards. As Lenin himself admitted (see below), empirically and prophetically, that the U.S.S.R. remained and would remain in the state of revolution: it was not properly the communist post-revolutionary society in which the state would wither away and property be decisively abolished. But if (as I have argued) Bloch defines his concrete utopia as the supersession of Soviet socialism, then that concrete utopia lacks empirical content. Its not-yet-being is nothing more than a bricolage of current (and therefore, for Marxists, ideological) being. The fact of bricolage, further, raises the question of what Bloch’s criterion or criteria of what counts as properly utopian really is, if indeed that proper utopia is not to be identified with actually-existing socialism. “Principle of hope” is far too capacious a category in which to
organize all anticipations of the ideal society. “Classless society,” it should be confessed, has functioned in the preceding chapter as a very vague label for what the lumpenproletariat prefigures. When moving beyond the vaguenesses of love into the concrete details of the realm of actualized freedom, etc., classless society applies equally to Tocqueville’s observations of the early republic and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s imaginations of Herland. So “classless society” cannot function for Bloch as the criterion of what counts as his utopia any more than “principle of hope” can. Some circularity seems to be demanded here: Bloch cannot know the content of utopia without a criterion of what counts as utopia; but he cannot know such a criterion without knowing the content of utopia. At the same time, Bloch’s philosophy of the future provides an important insight into the link between present and future. Bloch implies that the future in some sense already exists when he asserts that “everybody lives in the future, because they strive, past things only come later, and as yet genuine present is almost never there at all” (Bloch 4). Bloch shifts his ontological commitment from what appears the most undeniably real to what apparently does not exist at all, and in so doing facilitates the imagining of a praxis that would transform the future.

One can know the content of utopia just by bringing about that society; one knows the future by enacting it here-and-now. One imaginatively constructs what the future will look like and brings that future about through the activity of the present. But that activity does not stand in a relationship of cause and effect but of identity with the future; for the right kind of activity is already that future society. This is a peculiarity of the concept of utopia: utopia is a “break” with history and as such renders the future accessible. A practice like organizing, if carried out in a classless way, may itself become the future before the future arrives. Organizing, if carried out in relationships of love, equality, and solidarity, may itself be the ideal society. A “rehearsal” of the
future in a community and praxis of organizing is the concrete actuality of the future. The practice of utopia is the knowledge of utopia. Thus a “break” with history is not an arbitrary abandonment of necessary logic of history but the assumption of a new, contingent logic.

II. The Classless Society according to Marxism

In the classless society, declare Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), “we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (41). The formulation announces an ideal of harmony but not the means of that harmony. It sketches the form but does not specify the content of communism, and inaugurates a tradition of silence about the post-revolutionary future.\(^{35}\) This silence appears as an enduring problem for a tradition that defines itself as a philosophy of praxis, since the lack of a post-revolutionary goal threatens the energy and direction of action. What is at stake in knowing the content of the post-revolutionary future is, in Ruth Levitas’s words, to have a “catalyst” and “goal” to praxis.\(^ {36}\)

This cannot be the only stake of the difference between utopian and Marxist stances towards the post-revolutionary society. First, the activist question is not straightforward. It is not just a pragmatic, activist question but an epistemological one. Engels was committed to

\(^{35}\) See Fredric Jameson for a contemporary account of this problem (107-118). According to his “unknowability thesis,” any attempted vision of a “radically Other” or a post-revolutionary future will merely reflect our present form of life (111).

\(^{36}\) This is Levitas’s construal of the definition of utopia in terms of function (226). In chapter three of her *The Concept of Utopia* (2011), Levitas analyzes and critiques this definition of utopia as it is developed by Georges Sorel and Karl Mannheim.
A further word on the subject of issuing instructions on how the world ought to be: philosophy, at any rate, always comes too late to perform this function. As the thought of the world, it appears only at a time when actuality has gone through its formative process and attained its completed state….When philosophy paints its grey on grey, a shape of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy; the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk. (Elements 23)

This judgment on the function of philosophy seems to conflict, however, with the Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach, which seems to inaugurate the Marxist tradition of issuing instructions to the agent of history: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it” (123). These instructions, however, are not apparent in Marxian texts besides the Manifesto, and even there the instructions are limited to a list of a few provisional reforms; the world-historical urging is vague, mainly a report on the necessary activity of the proletariat rather than a set of instructions (Communist Manifesto 40). Philosophy can only give an account of what has already been logically determined. This retrospective commitment is at
once epistemological and political, preserving the freedom of the future and the science of the past.

Yet the Marxist denial of the future does not provide a decisive answer to Levitas’s point about praxis. Marxism is not unequivocally committed to Hegel’s Minervan legacy about the past; indeed, the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach is a partial break with this legacy. While this thesis—philosophy as the attempt not merely to understand the world but to change it—seems not in itself to posit any reality of the future, I will show below how indeed it does: that the very act of changing is an act of knowledge—a knowledge of the future. The utopian knowledge of the future is thus an implication of the first principle of Marxism, which I propose is a coincidence of epistemology and praxis. The two terms, epistemology and praxis, can be divorced from one another only with grave consequences. For a Marxism that denies knowledge of the future is like Hegel’s subject of history during the Terror: freedom in this context is strictly negative, a liberation from obstacles without any positive vision of the good. As I showed in the introduction, Hegel calls this strictly negative, terrorist freedom “absolute freedom” (*Phenomenology* 356, emphasis original).

This absolute freedom reduces individuals to the universal, and this “undivided Substance of absolute freedom ascends the throne of the world without any power being able to resist it” (357). In a false universality much like the one I analyzed in the utopian novel, this absolute “freedom [abolishes]…all social groups or classes which are the spiritual spheres into which the whole is articulated” (357). Again, the negation of absolute freedom appears to be the logic of the lumpenproletarian novel, the freedom of which consists of a rejection, if not negation, of the basic institutions of society, whether structures of recognition or apparatuses of interpellation. Dahlberg’s free-wheeling picaresque of 1928, then, appears less veracious than Algren’s
ominous novel of the bottom dogs’ potential for a Stalinist or Fascist negation of society. Utopia in Howells is false universality; in Algren it is a dangerous leveling of institutions. My contention in this chapter is that an articulation of the utopian and proletarian novels, however, is a key to overcoming the dangers of absolute freedom.

To return, then, to the vagueness of the Marxist tradition. More than the Manifesto, Marx’s Grundrisse appears to envision the communist future:

> It is no longer a question of reducing the necessary labour time in order to create surplus labour, but of reducing the necessary labour of society to a minimum. The counterpart of this reduction is that all members of society can develop their education in the arts, sciences, etc., thanks to the free time and means available to all. (142)

Marx characterizes communism, however, not as a positive series of activities but a space of possibility in arts, sciences, etc.—the openness of this “etc.” is the thrust of the whole sentence. The Grundrisse gives a negative definition of communism, but an echo of the seemingly more robust account found in The German Ideology, a state where “I,” liberated from the division of labor, can “do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic” (53). This cycle of activity bears a “utopian” residue that Marx and Engels will repudiate in the Manifesto, and cleanse themselves of entirely in their mature work. Yet its only positive content is hyperbole. The force of the catalogue is the conclusion that the division of labor has been superseded, not that it has been replaced by a new
system. Again, Marx appears to describe in some detail the nature of communist society in his “Critique of the Gotha Program” (1891):

In the higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and thereby also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but life’s prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of common wealth flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs! (321)

The rhetoric of this passage is important to scrutinize: the entire passage leads from anticipation to a single slogan. The post-revolutionary future alluded to here is the “second phase” of communism, a period of liberation from the “first phase” of communism. The latter is the dictatorship that V.I. Lenin, following Marx, described—indeed, enacted. During this first, transitional, still revolutionary phase, “bourgeois right,” or the flawed principle according to which the same credit is accorded to people of differing contributions to, and differing burdens within, society, remains in effect (Lenin 174-75). By contrast, it is in the hazy second stage of communism that the state and the system of bourgeois right dissolve. The form of this second stage is determined negatively: the lack of the dictatorship and indeed of government in general. “Life’s prime want” is merely a negation of rival needs and wants, not a stipulation of what a prime want would mean in practice (e.g., the number of hours or the variety of labor per day). The “all-round development of the individual” negates the atrophy of the individual’s faculties under capitalism rather than offering a sample of the faculties enabled by communism. The
“common wealth flowing more abundantly” negates the paltry flow of the present but does not give a concrete comparison of wealth in terms of goods per person or per community. “Free development” of each and all are the criteria by which one can judge various social arrangements, but it is not the arrangements themselves.

Vincent Geoghegan concludes that “[f]rom the fragments scattered throughout Marx and Engels’s work an impressive utopia can be assembled…” (34). But these are only fragments scattered about an absence. It is significant that in Socialism: Utopian and Scientific Engels projects two categories, two phases, onto the future: the period of state socialism, and the period of the withering away of the state. But against the relative specificity of this vision—indeed prediction—of state socialism, Engels opposes not a regime but a negatively defined “kingdom of freedom.” The translation “withering away” has been called inadequate; the word is rather the same as Hegel uses to describe “sublation.” But the difference in the moment of the state’s sublation, the inauguration of the kingdom of freedom, is that this moment is not determinate in terms of content (determining the future or succeeding moment), as all moments of the Hegelian dialectic in the Phenomenology are. While the dictatorship of the proletariat or the first phase of socialism denotes a regime and a body politic, the succeeding moment of history—post-history, actually—is not a regime but a realm with uncertain boundaries, topography, inhabitants, economy, culture.

37 Cf. Krishan Kumar’s similar argument that “there is a Marxist utopia to be found in Marxist writing, fragmentary and sometimes contradictory though it may be” (55). Kumar analyzes the relevant Marxist texts in detail (50-65) and points to Trotsky’s Literature and Revolution in support of his claim (63-64).
III. The Classless Society according to Utopian Socialism

If form is the space, negatively defined, of the future, content is the abundant details filling that space, whether world-historical or mundane. In contrast to the vague anticipations of the Marxists, utopian socialists such as Charles Fourier set forth social experiments with detailed content. For Fourier, the details of the “experimental phalanx” predict the destiny of humankind: the project of “association, which must necessarily be the system, designed by an economical providence” (*Harmonian Man* 27). These experiments are supposed to be carried out by “speculators,” a word which can be read in both the economic sense and the visionary sense of prediction (Fourier “Selections” 193). The speculator makes an investment expecting a return; the speculator invests the future with a certain meaning. The demands Fourier makes on the future are speculations that balance the two senses of the word. Even the raw materials of production are subject to precise qualifications: “It is necessary for a company of 1,530-1,600 persons to have a stretch of land comprising a good square league…. [The land] should be contiguous to a forest, and not far removed from a large city, but sufficiently so to escape intruders” (Fourier “Selections” 193). Again a double sense suggests the complexity of Fourier’s project: *it is necessary* suggests a practical requirement, but it also suggests inevitability, logical or historical. Indeed, the necessity is practical, logical, and historical: by prohibiting intruders, Fourier guarantees that his speculation will be free of the contingencies of outside factors; hence, as the end result of a chain of cause and effect from initial praxis to total instantiation, the community will be subject to prediction and control even down to the number of inhabitants. The human being or “integral soul” is not an individual but a combination of 810 individuals, to be divided according to passions and role in the division of labor (Fourier *Harmonian Man* 115-17). But that division is not fixed; one may, in accordance with one’s inclination, shepherd at five
AM, farm at seven, and garden at nine... (Harmonian Man 122). Fourier offers this schedule as a real possibility based on his calculation that one’s enthusiasm wanes after one or two hours’ engagement in the activity; thus this cycle of activity is literal rather than, as in the German Ideology, hyperbolic.

It might be objected that the opposition of literal and figurative is nonsense in the context of utopianism. To this it might be answered—perhaps a belated answer in this dissertation—that Fourier thought of his calculations as the epitome of scientific rigor. And the point is not whether indeed his science was rigorous but that it was offered not as “utopia” but as science. According to Frank and Fritzie Manuel, Fourier was a kind of scientist par excellence, conceiving of his science as an Ecart absolu or total break with the past of philosophical and scientific thought. As the Manuels put it,

Fourier’s own theory of the passions occupied a position of unique importance in the history of scientific discoveries. It had not really mattered that men were ignorant of the movements of the planets before Copernicus, of the sexual system of plants before Linnaeus, or the circulation of the blood before Harvey, of the existence of America before Columbus; but every delay in the proof and inauguration of the system of passionate attraction was felt in the flesh of mankind. (649)

It should be noted at this point, then, that both “utopians” like Fourier and “scientists” like Marx equally insisted on the scientific status—and the unprecedented scientific status, according to the “Theses on Feuerbach”—of their systems of thought. This note should encourage us to doubt Engels’s polemical distinction between utopian and scientific, even if we
doubt the scientificity of either or both forms of socialism. These two paradigms taken in isolation from one another are each seriously flawed as science; yet articulated together, the two paradigms attain a certain epistemological responsibility.

The ease of Fourier’s schedule of work perhaps belies the fact of its determinism. The precision of Fourier’s definitions seems to preclude the possibility of things turning out otherwise than they actually happen: they seem determined, excluding contingency and free agency. By prohibiting freedom, Fourier makes prediction possible. And indeed, he and fellow utopian socialist Robert Owen were determinists. However, utopianism as such does not necessarily exclude free agency. For Marxism, or “scientific” socialism, as Friedrich Engels observes in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1892), freedom can only occur after the revolution; for utopianism, freedom is available here and now. The mastery of the means of production is for Engels “the ascent of man from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom”—but the struggle to achieve that mastery is determined (Engels 73). The constitutive movement of utopian socialism, by contrast, is to organize a kingdom of freedom from within capitalism, such that visionary speculation about the future is economic speculation in the present. If Fourier defined his system in terms of an absolute break with the past, the liberatory sine qua non of socialist utopianism is what Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor call its contingent, radical “break with history” (26); yet I would add that in addition to this break, utopian socialism maintains, paradoxically, its ability to predict what society will be like after that break. These features are apparently inconsistent, for a “non-deterministic future history,” as Darko Suvin puts it, appears unforeseeable (Suvin 64).38 These features can be harmonized only

---

38 Suvin reconciles freedom and determinism by specifying that “historical necessity is…only one—strong but merely potential—force, which can be actualized or repressed by other
if the work of the phalanx or utopian society becomes a rehearsal of the future—the future already present in all of its rich content. As Ruth Levitas construes Karl Mannheim, “utopia” not only “anticipates the future,” it also “creates the future” (Levitas 88). So the freedom of the utopian present is the future.

Charles Taylor faults Marxism and other radicalisms for their vague construals of the future, but goes further, charging that “[a]ll that is done in these negative characterizations is to think away the entire human situation” (155). However, these future characterizations have enormous importance for the present human situation. Beginning with the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, Marxism appears to be the philosophy of changing the world. The finale of the Communist Manifesto juxtaposes present and the future: “The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.” And the last line is the practical implication of this juxtaposition: “Working men of all countries, unite!” (62) The anticipation of another world to be won is a practical precondition of solidarity, of praxis. The Marxist use of negative, formal characterizations of the post-revolutionary future can energize—and certainly has energized—forces in and among people. In such a dialectics, determinisms work—or do not work—through voluntary actions; in other words, ‘scientific’ preconditions must in their turn be fused with ‘utopian’ élan and projects” (62). Voluntary actions seem to trump necessity here; my thesis suggests how this abstract formulation might be actualized. My argument owes much to Suvin’s analysis.

39 The phrase Rehearsing the Future is also the title of Jan Relf’s 1993 study of women’s utopian writing “as a collective text…. [as] a critical process, and, as Tom Moylan has effectively argued, as ‘part of the emancipatory project’” (10). My term “radical novel” denotes a kind of collective text and (at least a mimesis of) an emancipatory project.
praxis. By contrast, utopian socialism provides a goal and catalyst to praxis by predicting what the entire human situation will be like. But if the post-revolutionary world negatively characterized stimulates praxis, the positive characterization of such a world would *a fortiori* stimulate praxis and provide a powerful guide for it.\(^{40}\) A positive prediction of the future would provide socialists with concrete measures of what world they want to win and provide them the assurance not only that the other world is possible, but that it will be actual as well.

Yet here we confront a dilemma: on the one hand, the knowledge of the future appears practically and ethically salutary. It is salutary for at least two reasons: it precludes the possibility of a negatively defined freedom of a revolutionary terror while inspiring praxis in a determinate way. On the other hand, knowledge of the future seems epistemologically irresponsible. The latter point needs further exploration. A Marxist might object, then, that the future cannot be known; any account of the future must be what Georges Sorel endorsed as a revolutionary “myth.” As Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe note, Sorel’s theory is marked by an emphasis on the contingency and freedom of the general strike (37). This aleatory nature of praxis for Sorel seems to fit hand in glove with his valorization of myth, but I would like to uncouple these two. Freedom and contingency do not imply myth. The irrationalism of Sorelian myth has rightly been criticized as tending towards fascism (Eagleton 187-88, Geoghegan 71). Myth is dupery and as such cannot ensure any salutary social change; since no prediction is rationally justified, no goal is assured. Therefore, in denying any content to anticipation of the future, the non-Sorelian Marxist appears to be in a position of epistemic responsibility relative to the

---

\(^{40}\) But see Jean Pfaelzer for the caveat that “the incentives of utopia can represent either a stimulus to or a digression from praxis, depending on the conception of historical process within the fictional activity of the text” (5).
mythologizing Utopian. We therefore reach a dilemma between utopian and Marxian socialism: utopianism offers mythical content and Marxism empty forms; utopianism offers a goal and catalyst to change, while Marxism eschews the goal in favor of positive knowledge of the present. The two socialisms refuse reconciliation, though each has its salutary and detrimental aspects. One must displace the other in such a way that the salutary is taken up and the detrimental discarded.

For an indication of how this might be possible we must take a detour through literature. Leon Trotsky takes this detour in Literature and Revolution (1924): “People will divide into ‘parties’ over the question of a new gigantic canal, or the distribution of oases in the Sahara (such a question will exist too), over the regulation of the weather and the climate, over a new theater, over chemical hypotheses, over two competing tendencies in music, and over the best system of sports” (231). Literary criticism tempts even the Marxist to indulge in the hyperbole of the future, since fiction is itself a kingdom of freedom. By this I mean that fiction ought to be articulated with praxis, not by any means that fiction is itself rhetorically efficacious to bring about revolutionary change. I will return to questions of praxis at the end of this chapter and in the following conclusion.

IV. Walter Benjamin on History and Time

In 1940, Walter Benjamin wrote that the “existence of a classless society cannot be thought at the same time that the struggle for it is thought. But the concept of the present, in its binding sense for the historian, is necessarily defined by these two temporal orders” (407). Benjamin

41 Kumar takes this passage from Trotsky as evidence of a Marxist utopian trend of predicting the future; I find it exceptional.
implies that in order to think of classlessness and class struggle one must shift back and forth between two incommensurable visions; one cannot hold them in the mind at the same time.\textsuperscript{42} The compatibility of the two temporal orders and their respective socialisms, utopian and scientific, can, however, be narrated through the conjunction of a series of literary texts. For the inability to imagine the classless society together with class struggle—or, to put the point more generally and suggest its contemporary application, to imagine the just society at some end point of a struggle of recognition and redistribution—is an “ideological” inability, a problem of the narrowness of horizons. If we imagine utopianism as a break with history, we need not remain captive to the image of linear history and the future as obscure, opaque, unreal, non-actualized. The impossibility Benjamin is talking about is not a logical impossibility nor an epistemological impossibility, for indeed, he hardly subscribes to the view of linear time with the unreal future it entails. Rather, Benjamin famously posits “Messianic time,” or time pregnant with revolutionary significance. Benjamin opposes the historicist version of time, “homogeneous, empty time,” to a

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{42} By contrast, Suvin in 1976 argued that the opposition is no longer “useful” because it breaks down with respect to dialectical logic, the notion of “science,” and the question of determinism versus freedom in the historical process. Thus the two senses of socialism “fuse” in Suvin’s conclusion: “socialism is a science because it is an unquenchable future-oriented utopia; and it can be a utopia because it is a science not in any ‘positive’ but in the Marxian, revolutionary sense” (64-65). Benjamin was reacting against the optimism of a concept of totalizing and inevitable historical progress, which drew a direct line from the catastrophes of the present to the reconciliation of the future. A synthesis of the two orders or their corresponding socialisms, however, need not be totalizing or inevitable, subsuming all of history under necessity. A literary analysis can show how to take both Benjamin and Suvin into account.
\end{quote}
messianic version of time: “History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now” (261). Benjamin indeed posits a continuity of time such that fragments of the revolutionary past are made available to present memory and praxis. Strangely, however, only the past, not the present, is open to the future. There are important but non-obvious reasons for this inaccessibility of the future. The ostensible reason is a religious or mystical prohibition on predicting the future. Judaism does not allow the investigation of the future, for this is the province of “soothsayers.”

The soothsayers who found out from time what it had in store certainly did not experience time as either homogeneous or empty. Anyone who keeps this in mind will perhaps get an idea of how past times were experienced in remembrance—namely, in juts the same way. We know that the Jews were prohibited from investigating the future. The Torah and the prayers instruct them in remembrance, however. This stripped the future of its magic, to which all those succumb who turn to the soothsayers for enlightenment. This does not imply, however, that for the Jews the future turned into homogeneous, empty time. For every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter. (264)

Yet it seems that there is a convergence of law and freedom here; the rule against investigation is enjoined just because of the need not to constrain the future or limit the moment when the Messiah might appear. By stipulating that every moment is the “strait gate” through which the Messiah might come, Benjamin maintains a constant hope in revolutionary possibility, sustains the condition of the Messiah’s free agency. This is a strictly anti-historicist hope that negates—indeed breaks with—the historical situation. In this sense, Benjamin’s view of history and resistance against it unexpectedly concurs with my own utopianism. In fact, there is no such
prohibition against investigation of the future in the essay; Benjamin’s position is much subtler:
“There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was
expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak
Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply.
Historical materialists are aware of that” (254, emphasis original). Our very anticipation of the
Messiah, even if we do not know the particular moment, is a product of the investigation of the
future. The weak Messianic power is the power to effect historical change, and this power has
been anticipated. And Benjamin can anticipate the course of the future just because of his
knowledge of the revolutionary past, which may be used as a means of defense or a weapon to
transform the present and thus the future: “To articulate the past historically does not mean to
recognize it ‘the way it really was’ (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up
at a moment of danger” (255).

Redemption cannot come about via the “angel of history.” It is significant that Benjamin
says “how one pictures” rather than the more determinate “how Klee pictured” or perhaps “how
we picture” or even “how humankind pictures”: “His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his
wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His eyes are staring, his mouth is
open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history” (257). The angel is a
symbol of historicism, not a sign of (a) our own right relation to history or (b) the constraints we
face looking at history. But where in this image are we? We are the ones facing the future;
indeed, in this anonymous and ahistoricist picturing from a full moment of Messianic time, we
have a view of all time, albeit in fragmented form. Indeed, we may view Paradise as well as the
angel. What lies beyond the angel, where does the wind blow?
His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (257-58)

Importantly, Benjamin comments on utopian socialism. Faulting a “vulgar-Marxist” telos of the “mastery of nature,” Benjamin comments approvingly, if a little ironically, of Fourier’s “fantasies” of a rapport with nature: “…Fourier’s fantasies, which have so often been ridiculed, prove to be surprisingly sound. According to Fourier, as a result of efficient cooperative labor, four moons would illuminate the earthly night, the ice would recede from the poles, sea water would no longer taste salty, and beasts of prey would do man’s bidding” (259). Notwithstanding the somewhat joking tone, Benjamin does not take the opportunity to censure Fourier for his prediction of the future. The enthusiasm for Fourier jars against the dark view of the interwar period in which Benjamin’s essay is inescapably situated, but the luminous utopian-socialist view and the obscure Messianic vision converge. A break with history is made possible because history is already broken, its bricolage thrusting through the future, constructing utopia.

In addition, Benjamin laments the fact that the Social Democrats fostered a resentment over “enslaved ancestors” instead of a hope of “liberated grandchildren” (260). If on this point Benjamin observes that the German working class seems only to confirm the backward-looking vision of history as catastrophe, he simultaneously implies that this vision is contingent on the
unfortunate particularity of one political party and not on a necessary pattern of history itself. He
suggests that looking beyond the angel to the prospect of liberated progeny would be better—
would perhaps be progress! In this sense, Benjamin sets himself against the mainstream of
Marxism that I have been exploring above. Later in his essay, however, Benjamin seems to
capitulate to the inevitability of fighting strictly “for the oppressed past” (263). This requires one
(or a revolutionary class) “to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history—
blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework” (263). One frees
oneself, presumably by freeing one’s ancestors, for the historical moments of each are bound up
in “the constellation which [one’s] own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus [one]
establishes a conception of the present as the ‘time of the now’ which is shot through with chips
of Messianic time” (263).

The discontinuity in his notion of time is still dangerous; there is no constraint on the
violence of this kind of absolute freedom: “The awareness that they are about to make the
continuum of history explode is characteristic of the revolutionary classes at the moment of their
action” (261). Before Benjamin has valorized Fourier’s anticipations, but his sympathies in fact
lie with “revolutionary classes.” How does one affirm a “break with history” that does not run
the risk of a “tiger’s leap into the past,” a fetishization of the French Revolution as surely as
Robespierre fetishized ancient Rome? How does one make a non-violent “revolution”? Only by
treating the “time of the now” as already the future does one avoid the Sorelian irrationalism of
the “soothsayers”: those who mythologize the moment of revolution. This is a path that
utopianism blazes, that Marxism refuses; but this divergence, like the incommensurability
between class struggle and classless society, can be reconciled in what I call, following Walter
Rideout, the radical novel.
V. Utopian and Proletarian Novels

The two kinds of socialism, utopian and Marxist, produced two genres of political writing in the U.S.: the utopian novels of the 1890s and the proletarian novels of the 1930s. In *The Radical Novel in the United States* (1956), Walter Rideout connects utopian and proletarian novels through a heritage that, he alleges, trends increasingly leftward from the 1890s through to the 1930s. Despite the genealogical linkage between the two genres, Rideout draws a firm distinction between the utopian novel and the radical (or proletarian) novel proper, for he claims that the former only calls for reform while the latter “demonstrates, either explicitly or implicitly, that its author objects to the human suffering imposed by some socioeconomic system and advocates that the system be fundamentally changed” (12, emphasis original). This definition immediately raises the question why Rideout would prefer the vague term “fundamental change” to “revolution.” The former term seems euphemistic, and doubtless part of the explanation is the social context of Rideout’s time: he was writing during McCarthy’s Red Scare. This explanation is not sufficient, however, for Rideout was hardly celebrating the radical novel but reporting on it. While one might observe that the very act of devoting a monograph to a genre implies a certain affirmation of the form, there are affirmations and affirmations, and Rideout’s affirmation is mild in the sense that it might be wielded by critics of any side of the ideological spectrum: indeed, in comparison with the apologetics of a Michael Gold or the harsh criticism of a Philip Rahv, Rideout appears relatively objective. The importance of “fundamental change” over revolution is actually its ostensibly more capacious reference. But under this aspect of “fundamental change,” “revolution” can comprehend the violent revolt envisioned in such works as Jack London’s *The Iron Heel* as well as peaceable transitions or “evolutions” gestured towards (significantly, *not narrated*) Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland*. If Rideout denies the
radicalism of the utopian novel, he cannot deny that the utopian novel presupposes fundamental change and that the proletarian novel looks forward to it.

Jean Pfaelzer (1984) and Barbara Foley (1993) have written comprehensive and authoritative studies of utopian and proletarian novels, respectively. The work of Dohra Ahmad (2009) on anti-colonial utopianism hints at the possibility of questioning the utopian/proletarian opposition. Ahmad traces the utopian development, between the era of the utopian novel and the proletarian novel, of the literature of W.E.B. Du Bois and the Indian nationalist Lajpat Rai, among others. But Ahmad does not draw out the literary implications of the relationship between Rai and Agnes Smedley, author of the early proletarian novel *Daughter of Earth* (1929). This novel fictionalizes the relationship and suggests that utopian goals and proletarian struggles are not incompatible but rather imply one another. Mark W. Van Wienen (2012) indicates how the two genres, utopian and proletarian, might be treated simultaneously, arguing that works like Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* employs the “mixed mode … of a realist-utopian novel” (164); placing this novel alongside utopias such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland*, Van Wienen observes that such modal innovations “bridg[e] the methods of realism with those employed in documentary and proletarian fiction of the 1930s” (3). The connection with which I will work, however, is not a bridge but a break: the moment of revolution.

The utopian socialist novel narrates a post-revolutionary society, while the proletarian novel, almost without exception, focuses on a pre-revolutionary society. Fredric Jameson (2005) observes that the “structural precondition” of utopian writing is the “radical separation of Utopia from historical reality” (412). Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward 2000-1887* (1888), for example, acknowledges but breaks with the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary past, telling a hazy backstory. “Early in the last century,” explains Dr. Leete to Julian West “the revolution was
completed by the final consolidation of the entire capital of the nation” (56). In *Equality* (1897), the sequel to *Looking Backward*, “evolution” becomes “Revolution.” Here Bellamy seems to recognize the radical character of the transition from capitalism to socialism at the same time as he strains to show the past as concrete and continuous with the post-revolutionary present. Neither the nineteenth century nor the twentieth century is narrated in the kind of rich detail that characterizes Julian’s experience of the year 2000. The scattered specific accounts of a historical period—“From 1873 to 1896 the histories quote some six distinct business crises”—are subsumed under generalization: “The periods of rallying between them were, however, so brief that we may say a continuous crisis existed during a large part of that period” (313). Mention of the 1892 presidential election and the fate of the People’s Party are indeed anomalies, though not ones that undermine the basic pattern (337). Even in William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* (1890), which takes the time to tell the whole of history in perhaps an explicit attempt to synthesize the utopian and Marxist traditions, we encounter two regimes of time—the present time is hardly a regime at all, but instead humankind liberated from time and its aging effects.

The prerevolutionary and revolutionary periods are just as strange and inexplicable to the Nationalists as the postrevolutionary period is inconceivable to the proletarians. The two fall under different regimes of representation, mimesis and prediction, which split history into two. Significantly, Ignatius Donnelly’s *Caesar’s Column* (1890) must effect a transition from a proletarian plot to utopian stasis via a final flight to utopia; similarly, the dream that structures the plot of Donnelly’s *The Golden Bottle* (1892), which traces the story of Ephraim Benezet from affordable loans to a unified world state, plays the role of the flight. Pfaelzer remarks, “Generally, utopia is achieved instantaneously, through literary gimmicks, a political sleight-of-hand that relies on two literary modes: a realistic or plausible representation of the new world
and a fantastic representation of the visit itself. Only in the few utopias that describe apocalyptic transformations do we see the dynamic process of social metamorphosis” (15, cf. 139).

The proletarian account of the future has a prospective haziness that matches the retrospective haziness of the utopian novel. Myra Page anticipates “Soviet America” in her proletarian novel *Gathering Storm* (1932) (328). Tom Crenshaw reports from his friend Fred that the Soviet Union is “some country. No fat mill owners and millionaires to live offa working people, no bosses to drive ‘em. Labor owns and runs factories, government, and everythin’. Things are like the way he never realized, till he saw it with his own eyes. [Fred] wants me to come over and see for myself” (249). Tom alludes to the public ownership of means of production and control of the government but makes clear that these must be seen for oneself: the proletarian novel cannot itself envision this regime. The proletarian novel can only give a verification—a verisimilitude—of present reality.43

A post-revolutionary state is the essence of the utopian novel. By “post-revolutionary” I do not necessarily imply the Marxist conception of the “withering away” or sublation of the state. Howells’s Altrurian utopia approaches this condition, but only *News from Nowhere* attempts to narrate it as it might work in the utopian present. On the contrary, the authoritarian Nationalist state of *Looking Backward* defines itself against the Marxist utopian hope of an anarchist end-of-history. By “post-revolutionary,” then, I mean a structural condition that comes about after the revolution, irrespective of the content of that condition. This is not to say that the content itself is irrelevant; on the contrary, the fact or the “that” of the detailed content of everyday life of utopia is what distinguishes it from the proletarian novel. This fact might be

---

43 *Moscow Yankee* (1935), Page’s novel of a Detroit worker’s time in the Soviet Union, shows a society still in the throes of the “first phase” of communism.
construed as some detailed account of a fully worked-out system of justice, where justice comprehends both distributive and recognizable measures. (As I argued in chapter three, the utopian novel strives towards a convergence of these two aspects of justice.)

If post-revolutionary justice characterizes the utopian novel, revolutionary hope is the essence of the proletarian genre.\(^{44}\) Again, by “essence” I mean *strife towards* rather than *static achievement*. This strife of character and plot is the narratological equivalent to hope expressed by the text as a whole. Accordingly, the content of proletarian novels is the process of organizing that often seems to fail in the end with an unsuccessful strike. Many proletarian novels, such as Mary Heaton Vorse’s *Strike!* (1930), Grace Lumpkin’s *To Make My Bread* (1932), and Robert Cantwell’s *Land of Plenty* (1934) narrate failed strikes, but they maintain revolutionary hope in the end insofar as *solidarity is maintained*. Cantwell’s novel concludes with a darkness that suggests either loss or liberation to come, an ambiguity embodied in the endurance of the former Wobbly Vin Garl:

The rain fell hard, drenching them while they waited, not like rain but like some new and terrible weapon of their enemies. He [Johnny] tried to crowd under the driftwood and Vin Garl put his hand on his shoulder, “Come on, son,” he said gently, “don’t cry,” and then they sat there listening to him, their faces dark with misery and anger, listening and waiting for the darkness to come like a friend and set them free. (369)

\(^{44}\) See Foley for an analysis of how “revolutionary perspective” became the favored definitional criterion of proletarian literature in the 1930s (117-28).
A proletarian novel that seems to show a successful revolution is an oddity indeed. Arnold Armstrong’s *Parched Earth* might be an example, at least allegorically so. Significantly, “revolution” is not the consequence of concerted action of workers but a circuitous consequence of the economy “in the last instance,” a repressed relationship to a diseased prostitute whose syphilis produces an “idiot” that is both the symbol and cause of the downfall of the community. The only “proletarian” mark of this novel is its final celebration of revolutionary destruction; when the dam bursts and the flood sweeps away the town, two of the working-class characters agree in the last line of the novel that “It sure looks like a rich harvest for us” (Armstrong 430).

With *Parched Earth* the proletarian form spills into the “bourgeois” novel proper, in its intertextual relationship, for instance, to *The Sound and the Fury*, another narrative where an idiot is emblematic of the downfall of the powerful, whose power is supplanted by a black servant’s stoicism: “They endured,” as Faulkner writes of Dilsey and her family (Faulkner 22).

The exception of *Parched Earth*’s nihilistic triumph and its parallel with *The Sound and the Fury*’s defeatism suggests a paradox in the mimesis of the sublation of the old society to form the new. Not only can the new not be imagined except in a gesture towards a future fruition (Armstrong) or else future trajectory (endurance, yet in as-yet-undetermined form); the new seems to presuppose a negation of all the old values, a nihilism to be strictly distinguished from the destructive preservation inherent in Hegel. By contrast, the narrative of the failed strike preserves the imagination of “the structure of the new society,” to quote the I.W.W. Preamble, “within the shell of the old.” Vin Garl and Johnny Hagan endure as a union constituted by hope within the shell of despair, the failed strike.

Through its temporal leaps from present to past and back again, *The Sound and the Fury* solves a certain problem of a narrative of fundamental social change, yet a properly proletarian
novel renounces this solution, despite their focus on past labor struggles. One might speculate that this is a consequence of the proletarian novel’s formal conservatism, its tendency to promote an ostensibly “transparent” kind of realism to give the illusion of present reality. Yet in fact such formal conservatism is not the rule. Several proletarian novels, *Land of Plenty* and *The Shadow Before* among them, use the same kind of temporal and perspectival shifts that Faulkner does. The point is not that Cantwell or William Rollins are innovators (they are rather following Joyce, Woolf, and Faulkner), but rather that they have the formal means for exploring the future that they choose not to exploit.

The innovation of John Dos Passos’s *U.S.A.*, however, provides an interesting case. Dos Passos mixes historical mimesis with fictional, juxtaposing Big Bill Haywood with Mac, and placing his imagined characters at the center of history. He does not, however, help himself to the exploration of the trajectory of the left from the past to the future: when he is portraying the I.W.W., for instance, he says nothing of its successor in the Communist Party of the twenties and thirties. Rather than employ a mediating figure such as Faulkner’s Dilsey to effect this passage, Dos Passos maintains the discontinuity of the present and the past and thereby any exploration of the present as future. As a consequence, the struggles of the I.W.W. do not risk being implicated in a narrative of necessity comprehending the whole of the pre-WWII Left. Mac of *The 42nd Parallel* and Mary French of *The Big Money* are alike consigned to a discontinuous past. This is not to say that *U.S.A.* is devoid of hope. At the culmination and low point of *U.S.A.*, Dos Passos’s series of stories about the Left, the Sacco and Vanzetti appeals, Mary is a figure for an impossible synthesis of revolutionary time in the proletarian novel: she “spent long evenings trying to coax communists, socialists, anarchists, liberals into working together. Hurrying along the stonpaved streets she’d be whispering to herself, ‘They’ve got to be saved, they’ve got to be
saved.’ When at last she got to bed her dreams were full of impossible tasks…” (The Big Money 363). Among these tasks is to tell a coherent story, not only of the U.S.A. but to the U.S.A. And if the continuity of the past is shattered, no revolutionary momentum can be extended into the future.

The proletarian narrative renounces prediction and mixes its vague hope with the anguish of the present. And if the proletarian novel sometimes makes a fetish of struggle—celebrating failure as “the worse, the better”—the utopian novel devalues it, even suppresses it. If the proletarian novel suppresses prediction, the utopian novel suppresses struggle. Yet if we read the tradition of the radical novel as a series of utopian and proletarian texts, structured around “fundamental change” from capitalism to socialism, we can benefit from the hope of the utopian novel and the epistemic rigor of the proletarian novel. To return to Benjamin, the radical novel is no promise of seeing history sub specie aeternitatus but of construing history, despite all of its discontinuities, as a history of both class struggle and classless society. Following on the encounter between universality and the intersectionality critique in previous chapters, I want to urge that “class struggle” and “classless society” ought to be taken figuratively as potentially standing in for a whole series of social justice struggles.

VI. Looking Backward

Looking Backward is paradigmatic of the utopian novel of the fin de siècle not merely for its groundbreaking status, bringing forth both imitation and satire, but for its affirmation of a future

45 Suvin sums up this relationship in terms of the two socialisms: “The differentia specifica between Proudhon (or other utopians) and Marx is…that notion and activity in which theory and practice, inversion and subversion, determinism and free-will, utopia and knowledge meet, the basis, center, and purpose of Marxian socialism: it is revolution” (64).
better world. Bellamy attempts to balance the contingency of romance with the necessity of prediction. He is compelled to give a seemingly inexorable narrative of how his future U.S.A. came to be, but the force of his writing is rather the force of contingency: a proposal rather than a prophecy, an appeal to instantiate such a better world now rather than to wait for it to come about. Bellamy, in his postscript to Looking Backward, declares that his book, “although in the form a fanciful romance, is intended, in all seriousness, as a forecast, in accordance with the principles of evolution, of the next stage in the industrial and social development of humanity, especially in this country” (194). “Evolution” and “stage” betray Bellamy’s adherence to a narrative of slow, inevitable progression, but his final word on the matter—not exactly consistent with his commitment to evolution—that this narrative can be collapsed to a few years based on the contingency of human action: “Looking Backward was written in the belief that the Golden Age lies before us and not behind us, and is not far away. Our children will surely see it, and we, too, who are already men and women, if we deserve it by our faith and by our works” (196, emphasis added). What is inevitable is that the prediction will hold true for the next generation; what is contingent is that the prediction will hold for the present generation. In this latter sense, Bellamy makes good on the promise of the free “break with history” that the determinists Fourier seemed not to keep.

Looking Backward forecasts the positive content of the future in detail. The insomniac Julian West is hypnotized to sleep and does not awake until a century later. Industry has been

46 John Bachelder complains in the preface to his critique of Looking Backward, A.D. 2050: Electrical Development at Atlantis (1890), Bellamy “had but faintly sketched, or not thoroughly investigated, the situation” (3); “in the all-important social and industrial question his investigations were superficial and unsatisfactory” (4). Though Bachelder goes on to detail a
nationalized, leaving the state as the “one capitalist in the place of all other capitalists” (57). The state pays workers equally with an annual share on their “credit cards” (71). Distinctions remain only in terms of prestige: “public repute, social distinction, and official power” (77). Labor is organized into an “industrial army” in which all must work between the ages of twenty-one and forty-five (60). Everyone has the chance to choose, in accordance with his or her abilities, to be a “brain or hand worker” (64).

Despite the institutionalization of choice, minute control appears, as in the phalanx, crucial to prediction. Bellamy’s society is strongly authoritarian: an industrial army, a powerful executive branch unchecked by the legislature, and a judiciary unchecked by lawyers and jury. Three grades of ascending ability divide the workforce (92). The hierarchy of authority within the industrial army is maintained through the elections of foremen and supervisors who vote according to seniority (91-92). Retired members of the industrial army elect “heads of departments,” who may count as candidates for President, or “Commander-in-Chief” of the industrial army, whose duties include “control and discipline” of the army (124). New laws are unnecessary because those in place “settle for all time the strifes and misunderstandings which in [the nineteenth century] called for legislation” (132). Not only does Bellamy’s prediction describe the new world of a “loose form of federal union of world-wide extent,” but it projects a plan of society that undermines Bellamy’s “communism” (while developing many ideas of government intervention that resemble Bellamy’s), at the outset he establishes that he and Bellamy are engaged in the same project: to thoroughly investigate the future. Taking a science-fictional approach, Bachelder’s contribution to the project of utopia consisted in grounding the continuity between present and future through an implied chain of cause and effect.
Authority is determined all the way up and all the way down. Most insidiously, however, authority works because it is naturalized and internalized:

“Service, now, I suppose, is compulsory upon all,” I suggested.

“It is rather a matter of course than of compulsion,” replied Dr. Leete. “It is regarded as so absolutely natural and reasonable that the idea of its being compulsory has ceased to be thought of.” (60)

Fourier’s problem of prediction premised on control returns. It might be questioned whether the future can be forecast precisely because, though not compulsory, it is rooted in authoritarian assumptions about what is natural and reasonable. Given speculation of what is natural and reasonable, and given the assumption that history has a natural and reasonable trajectory, one could equate speculation with prediction. Only because humans are minutely controlled—naturally as well as socially determined—can the future be known.

So we reach a seeming contradiction. On the one hand, the hope of utopianism is grounded in contingency, the space and the rich content of freedom in history—even freedom from nature and reason, where nature and reason are taken as constraints on the possibilities of human action. On the other hand, the prediction of utopia seems premised on authoritarianism—a social structure grounded in nature and reason.

---

47 It is important that nearly all of the utopians of the 1890s maintained the idea of a constant human nature, although Bellamy inconsistently subscribes to a kind of eugenics in opposition to which crime would appear as “atavism” of the degraded state of nature under
Bellamy himself must have come to acknowledge something like this contradiction, because he radically democratizes his Nationalist regime in *Equality*. Dr. Leete reports to Julian that “We vote a hundred times perhaps a year, on all manner of questions, from the temperature of the public baths or the plan to be selected for a public building to the greatest questions of the world union…” (275). By welcoming a diversity of opinion, democracy challenges the notion that the reasonable has a single definition. The institution of democracy, insofar as it assumes fundamental disagreement is natural and reasonable, as well as unpredictable, would seem to undermine not only the authoritarianism of *Looking Backward* but also to render impossible its forecast of the future. It seems we can have contingency and freedom on the one hand and prediction on the other hand, but not both.

The apparent contradiction at the heart of *Looking Backward* is the paradox that the utopian break can be both contingent and predictable. We return to the problem of epistemological justification: the Marxist might agree that prediction might be nice, but how can it be anything but illusory? Two of Bellamy’s early stories, “The Blindman’s World” and “The Old Folks’ Party,” shed light on the sense in which Bellamy’s utopia is both a forecast and free, how it is not mythical but empirically verifiable.

“The Blindman’s World” narrates the tale of Professor S. Erastus Larrabee, an astronomer who finds himself transported in a trance or dream to the surface of Mars, where a sage Martian (not unlike Dr. Leete) reveals the central problem of the human predicament: ignorance of the future. The “Blindman’s World” is the title that the Martians give Earth, capitalism. By contrast, eugenics is a central part of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s utopia *Herland*. But the idea of a “new man” is an invention of Nietzsche taken up by the authoritarian states, fascist and “Communist,” of the twentieth century.
because the inhabitants of Earth are peculiar precisely because they cannot know the future. The human “ever-present dread” of the future, particularly of death, meets the Martian “Godlike security” of foreknowledge (37). But Bellamy cannot escape the conclusion that foreknowledge precludes free will. Indeed, “to foresee events was to foresee their logical necessity so clearly that to desire them different was as impossible as seriously to wish that two and two made five instead of four” (43). Here again is the double bind: the demand to predict the course of history, and the demand to make a contingent break with the logical necessity of history.

And Bellamy makes the future even messier. “The Old Folks’ Party” challenges “Blindman’s” view of the future with a vision of the future that preserves contingency and freedom. The party is a game a group of young men and women play: they will spend a week pretending that they are their future, aged versions of themselves, and at the end of the week they will meet to discuss their experiment by reminiscing over their projected lives. In the course of simulating their old age, however, the sense of reality of a new identity takes hold:

Their acting had become spontaneous. They were perplexed and bewildered as to their identity, and in a manner carried away by the illusion their own efforts had created. In some of the earlier conversation of the evening there had been occasional jests and personalities, but the talk had now become entirely serious. The pathos and melancholy of the retrospections in which they were indulging became real. All felt that if it was acting now, it was but the rehearsal of a coming reality. (62)

The present rehearses the future. The arguments of the two stories contradict one another, because in “The Old Folks’ Party” the characters finally find their rehearsal of the future
terrifying, while in “The Blindman’s World” the prospect of the future produces solace. It is just possible to reconcile the views of the two stories, however, as long as the “logical necessity”—a gratuitous piece of hyperbole—of future events is rejected. The future is indeed knowable, but only to the extent that we rehearse it freely in the present. Prediction, then, is a resolve to instantiate the new society that is confirmed immediately by a rehearsal for that new society. Past and present struggles toward socialism are determinations of the future—determinations in the double sense of resolve and causation. Only because the strikers are resolute is their cause efficacious. This is not resolve in the Sorelian, mythical sense, because the egalitarian moment of the strike provides an imitation, a rehearsal, of the classless society to come. But only an examination of the proletarian novel vis-à-vis the utopian novel can demonstrate this, since the process of instantiation—the week of the young people imitating the future—is absent from the utopian novel.

VII. *Land of Plenty*

Robert Cantwell’s proletarian novel *Land of Plenty* (1934) attends exclusively to the present, but positions itself nonetheless within a revolutionary narrative of history. Cantwell attempts to represent totality not merely through the narration of each minute from various perspectives, but from this allusion to past and future revolutions. Revolution is an absence that determines the course of the narrative, though the workers caught up in that narrative are free. Part One of *Land of Plenty*, “Power and Light,” narrates a single tumultuous night in a lumber mill after a power outage, a “swift blotting out of the visible world” (3). Part Two, “The Education of a Worker,” follows the young mill hand Johnny Hagen through a strike and its failure. Despite manager MacMahon’s claim about a “smooth organization” (135), the workers are disgruntled about a recent pay cut. Then the power outage happens. Managers Carl and MacMahon and workers
Hagen and Winters scuffle in the darkness and the two workers are fired. The day after the power outage, the Fourth of July, the workers gather on Hagen’s lawn to discuss the situation. Vin Garl, the former Wobbly, suggests a strike. When they arrive at work the next day, they find that twenty cards have been pulled—twenty employees fired. A second gathering forms: the workers congregate outside of the management’s office, the machines are turned off, and the day shift joins the night shift in a strike. Though Cantwell focuses on present verisimilitude, the future is the moment of revolution that Johnny finds presaged in the start of the strike. The events of a power outage and a strike shatter the continuity of the empirical and open the way for history and the future; the outage blots out the visible world and the strike undermines the “broad normal world” (367). The two events figure the revolution that has ostensibly been excluded from the proletarian novel and prepare it for a juxtaposition with Bellamy’s narrative, which links the American Revolution with the revolutionary strike.

MacMahon maintains that “in the main we’ve got a smooth organization, seldom any trouble” (135, emphasis Cantwell’s). He extols the “wonderful organization” of the Navy fleet that the fireworks illumine: “They pay those fellows a dollar a day. Never a murmur. If they kick, they lock them up” (155). Meanwhile, the chaos in the factory yields another form of organization. If Dee Garrison is right that the strike in proletarian novels figures revolution (Garrison x), the power outage and walkout suggest the possibility of a different declaration of independence, this time the stark 1930s choice between fascism and socialism. Socialism, Cantwell implies, is a new sort of democracy that leads to the men gathering on the Fourth to discuss the situation and decide on a strike. This defiance leads to the days on the picket lines and finally the occupation of the factory and a battle with the police and special deputies. Then
the strike is broken, and Hagen is shot to death. His son Johnny has received his education: that is, he has been radicalized. Cantwell closes the book with Vin Garl’s attempt to reassure Johnny.

The strike may be an allusion to class struggle and revolution, but it is specifically a democratic revolution. The men appear spontaneously at Winters’s house out of concern for Winters and Hagen, discuss the death of the I.W.W. and their distrust of the exclusive A.F.L. (262-63). The I.W.W. was the “one big union” for workers, even the “unskilled.” Significantly, factory hands, lacking the I.W.W., do not affiliate with any union. They do not need an organizer. The gatherings of the men at Winters’s house are not idealized, however; this democracy is a matter of contending powers: “Crowded around the table, their faces strained and sweating in the hot night, the men argued fiercely, trying to impose their wills on one another by the intensity with which they stated what ought to be done” (305). Yet at the same time Winters’s house is a preview of a kingdom of freedom, of “ought” rather than is: a home where the “doors were always unlocked and someone was always there”; a strike headquarters that dissolves the division of public and private (305). The occupied factory, too, figures equality. If Winters’s home is the solidarity of egos engaged in the same project, the factory is momentarily the place where the men are workers—even humans—*per se*, without even the distinction of scabs and strikers. In the first frenzy of the occupation, “the cops could not tell the scabs from the strikers,” and the lights go out again (323).

The strike threatens to become general across the lumber industry. There are “five hundred men out here,” says Vin Garl. There are “a thousand out on the other side of town, five hundred out in the South End….They [the owners] don’t know what’s happening; they don’t know but what every mill is going to walk out” (349-50, emphasis original). Vin Garl worries that the strike will be violently suppressed, so that the I.W.W. massacres of “Centralia and
Everett won’t be anything to what’ll happen here” (348). For the I.W.W., the general strike is both a tactic of revolution and the epitome of working-class solidarity: it prefigures the classless society and is in its internal organization—and disorganization—a kind of classless society.

According to Thomas J. Hagerty’s I.W.W. “Wheel of Fortune,” all industries are related, centralized and decentralized, in the single big union (10). The Wheel signifies a reality already and not-yet: already instantiated in the present structure of the I.W.W., and not yet realized in the working class generally. The general strike is the accomplishment of the Wheel of Fortune, the destiny of the working class. In William Haywood’s talk “The General Strike,” the general strike is in a sense both the means and the end of the post-revolutionary society. It is often asserted that the I.W.W. eschewed politics, but Haywood’s talk redefines politics in the vision of the I.W.W., asserting that

…the broadest interpretation of political power comes through the industrial organization; that the industrial organization is capable not only of the general strike, but prevents the capitalist from disfranchising the worker; it gives the vote to women; it re-enfranchises the black man and places the ballot in the hands of every boy and girl employed in the shop, makes them eligible [sic] to take part in the general strike, makes them eligible to legislate for themselves where they are most interested in changing conditions, namely, in the place where they work” (Haywood 8).

Laclau and Mouffe remark that for Sorel the general strike is not an observable fact but a “regulating principle, which allows the proletariat to think the mélange of social relations as organized around a clear line of demarcation; the category of totality, eliminated as an objective description of reality, is reintroduced as a mythical element establishing the unity of the workers’
consciousness” (40). Yet the general strike for the I.W.W., though it was often described alongside the ideology of friend/enemy and worker/capitalist, entailed no such homogenization of subject positions; it is important that the general strike enables a self-legislation, the very definition of autonomy, rather than a mere unity. For the I.W.W., autonomy is the obverse of solidarity. Furthermore, the general strike is not a Sorelian myth but an empirically verifiable picture of the future, for in the general strike, by its their very autonomy women, people of color, and even boys and girls recover control over their labor, decide whether to labor and under what terms. During the strike the alienation between worker and product, and between comrades, ceases to be; at the same time the strike is the depth of immiseration, a fury of dangerous activity without material support; one is suddenly set against ruling class and “repressive state apparatus” and one’s everyday activity on picket line or shop floor given the label “violence.”

Although the danger and promise of future revolution remain the horizon of his hope, Cantwell refuses a Bellamian forecast. Having lost the battle with the police, Vin Garl and Johnny hide on the tide flat until the night comes so that they can make their way home: they wait “for the darkness to come like a friend and set them free” (369). The paradox of the darkness on its way to set the factory hands free, and thus to return them to the initial potential of the power outage, is confirmed in the residual hope of Vin Garl, summing up the fate of the I.W.W.: “‘They didn’t die out…They were wiped out.’ (263). Vin Garl is a 1930s radical who continues to stand as an alternative to those taking orders from the Comintern: the old Wobbly has been wiped out but still persists.

How we read Cantwell, how we determine the meaning of the ending, is a function of the texts we juxtapose it with. Is The Land of Plenty ironic or hopeful? Juxtaposed with the other novels of failed strikes, most of which end with a failure that foreshadows success, Cantwell may
appear hopeful, too. The worker is educated: if not ready for the general strike, the lost hope of Wobbly Vin Garl, he is ready for something else to come. Tom Kromer’s *Waiting for Nothing* (1935) rejects this final hope. Of all proletarian novels, it is the most empirically rigorous treatment of the failure of the working class in the Depression. Kromer deliberately excludes the hopeful truth of the whole, eschewing allusions to past and future revolutions, for a vision trained on the lives of the homeless and jobless. The bulk of the proletarian novel genre ignores this unemployment, but it is the reality onto which Cantwell’s broken strike opens. There is no hopeful ambiguity in the repeated search for food and shelter. *Waiting* splits into non-linear chapters with only a stammering, satirical progress towards class-consciousness, or towards the final incantation that confirms the novel’s hopelessness: “day after day, week after week, year after year, always the same—three hots and a flop” (Kromer 129). Kromer’s waiting is predicated on the death of the revolutionary proletariat. He sees the “stiffs” in a jungle camp as tombstones (115); a spectral solidarity remains, for “We are not strangers. The fire has brought us together” (115). The ghastly quality travesties the spirit of the proletariat.

The novel is a putative reworking of Kromer’s own years as a vagrant, which admitted no relief besides fifteen months in a Civilian Conservation Corps camp.48 When charged with vagrancy and shoved in front of a judge, Kromer attempts to appeal to the picture of “a worldwide crisis in unemployment” as “mitigating circumstances” (29). The judge is not interested in anything Kromer has to say beyond an admission of guilt. The true may be the whole, but the truth of the “stiffs” Kromer represents is the guilt of being the economy’s waste product. *Waiting for Nothing* threatens to drain the hope out of *Land of Plenty*. The fate of the proletarian genre is

48 See the “Autobiography” in Kromer (257-59).
at stake in this book that mocks resistance: “You can stop a revolution of stiffs with a sack of toppin’s” (72).

Cantwell takes the Lukácsian stance that totality is a precondition of revolutionary praxis. Hagen sums up the class hierarchy, who’s “riding” whom: “He’s [Carl’s] a little bastard. Mac’s riding him and somebody else is riding Mac” (48). And this is a mere précis of the repetitions of the novel, which approaches the problems of class endlessly from all perspectives, from Carl to Johnny, attempting to represent the totality of a situation. As Lukács would predict, this picture of the facts amounts to a “first sure knowledge of [the workers’] strength” (Cantwell 204), though only the “precondition” for praxis, not a sufficient condition (Lukács History 20).

In a review of Waiting for Nothing for the New Republic, Cantwell praises the book as “a document more candid and less squeamish than any of the recent novels dealing with the depression…” (252). But he rejects the fragmentary structure of Waiting, calling rather for an as-yet-unwritten “epic of the unemployed” that would represent “a world disordered and in ruins, with millions of nomads and beggars drifting ceaselessly from town to town” (252). By “epic” Cantwell means the genre that depicts the world, the totality of life. The “epic” of Cantwell’s review connotes a nostalgia, what the early Lukács calls “an expression of…transcendental homelessness” (41). In Waiting for Nothing this transcendental homelessness becomes a literal homelessness, the subject-matter of Waiting and the implication of a fatherless and jobless Johnny Hagen. Indeed, the stringent empiricism of both Land and Waiting cancel out any transcendent sense of loneliness in a strictly material world. If through his review of Kromer

49 According to Foley, Lukács ’s later Marxist criticism influenced American leftist critics in the first half of the thirties (151-55).
Cantwell reveals his commitment to the hope of totality, the review at the same time registers the anxiety that representing Lukács’s “rounded whole” is now impossible (Lukács Theory 33).

*Waiting for Nothing* is a critique of *Land of Plenty*, a sequel that fills out the story of the Depression and defeated revolutionary hope. The ending of *Land of Plenty*, the hopeful midpoint between past and future revolutions, appears to be waiting for nothing. Totality is not the hopeful precondition for praxis; rather, it seems the premise of hopelessness.

This hopelessness is not one-dimensional, however, but might be taken, following the argument in the preceding chapter, as a kind of hopeless endurance similar to the continued resistance that Camus finds in the symbol of Sisyphus, “proletarian of the gods.” The decisive turn in *Waiting for Nothing* is not from quiescence to radicalism but from despair to endurance in spite of despair—the rejection of nihilism even if one expects nothing. The question of nihilism returns us to the comparison of *The Sound and the Fury* and *Parched Earth*. These two texts seem to confirm Benjamin’s assertion that struggle and utopia are incommensurable visions. Indeed they are incommensurable, but Benjamin’s claim does not rule out the possibility that a juxtaposition—an articulation or even a synthesis—of two texts would allow one to envision both orders at once, as long as we are no longer held captive by the idea of the bourgeois reader who sees the world steady and sees it whole. Kromer ignores the residual hope of the I.W.W., the union of itinerants, that Cantwell maintains. Indeed, if *Waiting for Nothing* is the ominous possibility set free by the denouement of *Land of Plenty*, that denouement is likewise the unspoken possibility set free at the end of *Waiting for Nothing*. The I.W.W. and the general

---

50 For Foley, the proletarian novel at its best stimulates “critical totalization,” or taking up the fragments the texts offer and seeing how they can relate in order to construct a single world (401).
strike, as both the centralizing and decentralizing forces on the masses, is an alliance, not a
whole. And an alliance or a series of industries or narratives articulated in solidarity rather than a
pure undifferentiated coherence may be practically efficacious, a matter of not merely
understanding the world (seeing it steady and whole) but fundamentally changing it (seeing it
broken apart, the new society and the shell that, like the progress of the forms of the fruit in the
preface to Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, “supplant one another as mutually incompatible,” indeed
refutations, of the preceding, that can nonetheless be represented in a single process
(*Phenomenology* 2). That process perhaps only appears spectrally in the single text—a narrative
of insomnia, jungle camp, or dimly sensed revolutionary past and future—but appears fully in a
series of texts, that is, at the level of genre. Genre is the dialectic that brings together
incommensurable temporal orders, that articulates literary history. It is important to remember
here that genre does not adequat those orders but sets itself in contradiction to them: the “radical
novel” as the aspect under which to see both proletarian novels and utopian novels is an aspect
that contradicts—indeed, refutes the dialectic of—the proletarian or the utopian. Genre here is
contradiction, not adequation. The contradiction of the radical novel is that between a series of
texts about achievement and struggle in contradiction to a coherent history that unites temporal
orders: out of this contradiction between the intrinsic and the imposed, the series and the pattern
or dialectic, a sort of synthesis arises, the loose synthesis of solidarity whereby struggle and
achievement exist side by side in their respective freedom, neither determining one another but
rather mutually conditioning one another.

In a singular place, the outbreak of the strike, Cantwell breaks the rigor of focus on the
present and gives a view into Johnny’s future consciousness. Johnny calls “*Come on out!*” to the
office employees. The ecstatic feeling of “that first sweet hour when they danced out of the
factory” extends beyond the mere week to follow (300, emphasis original); the feeling is irreplaceable and permanent, and becomes the hope that “Some day all the people would come out of the factories, singing in the streets…” (301). This vision returns us to the syndicalist celebration of the general strike and connects past, present, and future revolutionary labor action. In the context of *Land of Plenty*, the general strike resonates with the memory and spectral persistence of the I.W.W. The one big union was conceived both negatively and positively, in both Marxist and utopian terms. According to their “Manifesto,” the Wobblies organized by “craft autonomy locally, industrial autonomy internationally, and working class unity generally” (9). “By organizing industrially,” declared the I.W.W. “Preamble” of 1908, “we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old” (13). In this sense, the proletarian work of the I.W.W. just was the utopian work of the future, the industrial democracy “wherein there shall be no wage slavery, but where the workers will own the tools which they operate, and the product of which they alone will enjoy” (“Manifesto” 8). These negative characterizations of the industrial democracy were supplemented by the positive stipulations of Wheel of Fortune, which showed the relationship of every industry to the central body of the union. Yet the everyday work of the I.W.W. concretized this utopian vision and made its apparent myth empirically verifiable. Of course, only traces of the I.W.W. exist in *Land of Plenty* or the proletarian novel in general. Page’s *Gathering Storm* celebrates the supersession of the I.W.W. by the Communist Party. Tom Crenshaw declares that “[t]he wobblies have gone shot but the Reds are the real things” (248). “Going shot” and being “real things” is an interesting distinction, for it implies, like the distinction between romanticism and a steady apprehension of reality, or the distinction between utopianism and materialism, that the thing that has gone shot was somehow illusory. A more intuitive difference would be “the wobblies were utopians but the Reds are the real
things”—but the wobblies were the real things, they have simply lost their struggle. Even Page, then, unwittingly seems to acknowledge the reality inherent in utopianism or “romanticism,” yet she denies that reality is recoverable. But against Page’s dreams of a Soviet America, Cantwell’s book persists in the tradition of the I.W.W. in its insistence that the initial moment of the strike, of both factory and office workers, is already the instantiation of democratic, classless society.

VIII. The Radical Novel: Utopian and Scientific

In Looking Backward, the noisy poverty that surrounds Julian West’s house, and the strikes that result from that poverty, are the causes of Julian’s insomnia. Indeed, it is a general strike, one of the “concerted refusals to work” that delays the building of a new house “in one of the most desirable parts” of Boston, and thus delays his marriage to Edith Bartlett (36). His last wish before falling asleep for a century is the fantasy of chopping off, in one blow, the heads of the American working classes (41). In Equality, however, Dr. Leete persuades Julian to believe that the strikers are “the pioneers in the revolt against private capitalism which brought in the present civilization” (207). Equality reappraises the contribution of the general strikers; they are as significant as the “minutemen at Concord and Lexington, in 1775” (208). Bellamy provides a narrative of revolution—the bourgeois revolution, the socialist “evolution”—in which to situate Cantwell. The Land of Plenty of 1934 belongs between both revolutions. Compared with Waiting for Nothing, Land of Plenty offers only an elegy for the I.W.W. and the hope of the general strike. Compared with Looking Backward and Equality, however, the revolutionary hope of Land of Plenty persists. Bellamy would push Cantwell further, and Cantwell would radicalize Bellamy, too. Cantwell democratizes Bellamy, demanding a progress in the revolution in thinking that took place in Bellamy’s mind between Looking Backward and Equality, and Bellamy provides hope to the ambivalent Cantwell. Bellamy and Cantwell are an articulation of
hope and epistemic rigor, of utopian and proletarian. They are also a resolution to the problem of contingency and necessity: Bellamy provides the sense of destiny that rests in tension with Cantwell’s ambiguous denouement, in which the darkness could mean freedom or oppression.

But in the memory of Bellamian hope it is important not to forget Kromer, who repudiates the totalizing senses of revolution particularly attractive during the Depression: the notion that the true is the whole, or the notion of inevitable progress from the catastrophes of the present to the reconciliation of the future to which Benjamin objected in denying that the two temporal orders could be synthesized. In “The Blindman’s World,” the Martian philosopher admits to Professor Larrabee that “memory…is a very slightly developed faculty with us, and quite too indistinct to be trustworthy” (42). Knowing the future risks forgetting that the 1930s did not fulfill the predictions of the 1890s, and that the Soviet utopia about which many proletarian novelists dreamed had little correspondence with their own democratic hopes. Prediction of the future demands a good memory of the history of labor and socialism. This must include the memory of the failures of the I.W.W. itself; but primarily that memory was that of an unactualized potential, perhaps what Ernst Bloch designated “not-yet-being.” The I.W.W. had no chance to become the “real thing” because from the first it had “gone shot.” Yet one could argue that the Wobblies were crushed so decisively precisely because they were recognized from the first as the real thing, as a serious threat to solidity of capitalist society because a real alternative to it.

A rehearsal of socialism, whatever that might involve, would find Bellamy’s Nationalism suspicious and Cantwell’s solidarity admirable, but nonetheless seek an articulation between prediction and struggle that might yet find inspiration in the I.W.W. This articulation would bring together present and future not in the totalizing, deterministic way but in a way that makes
the present a free rehearsal of the future. The proletarian novel and the utopian novel together form the genre of the radical novel in which both the class struggle and the classless society can be thought. Articulating the proletarian and utopian novels mirrors the practical attempt to take up what is best in both traditions of socialism. The ambiguous particulars of organizing for socialism, whatever those might be, just are the content of the future. To organize from within the present economy at once rehearses and predicts socialism. The “utopian,” emptied of its static, determined Nationalist content, becomes mere form; the “proletarian,” whose content first appears limited to the present, becomes the content of the future in all of its contingent verisimilitude. The classless work of organizing predicts, determines, rehearses—and is the classless society.

---

51 In this sense, the radical novel resembles what Tom Moylan calls the “critical utopia,” a rejuvenation of the utopian tradition in the 1960s and 70s that rejects stasis through “a meditation on action rather than system” (Moylan 49). The conjunction of radical novel and critical utopias may be a way of remembering three great moments of the Left: the turn-of-the-century, the 1930s, and the 1960s.
Conclusion. Utopia/Praxis

I. Review of Argument

The radical novel builds solidarity between two ostensibly distinct genres and their corresponding traditions of socialist thought in the U.S. In a kind of gestalt shift, seeing the two forms of the socialist novel under the aspect of the radical novel organizes all of revolutionary history—the revolutionary break with history—under a single heading. Yet solidarity is a form of synthesis that does not achieve “reconciliation,” or the end of social antagonism. There are two apparently competing metaphors in Bakhtin, the carnival break with history and the history of laughter. The break with history comes about through the intersection of the alternative history, the utopian history, with History in the Marxist sense. As a narrative of solidarity, the ultimate form of recognition, the radical novel comprehends equality and love while extending their horizon. Solidarity is a universalization of love (the particular) and equality (the general). If the equality of the utopian novel is finally false, and the love of the lumpenproletarian novel finally despairing, the striving of both in the radical novel exemplifies a true and hopeful universalism, or the horizon that in Gadamer’s sense is at once a limit and a beyond.

The theory of genre, genre as a dual-aspect dialectic of argument and narrative, is both utopian and proletarian insofar as it is instantiated in the very aesthetic structure of utopian and proletarian novels. Formally and materially, utopian and proletarian novels are quite similar: “tendentious,” “didactic”; structured around a revelation of revolution in the intersection of history and History; structured by the struggle of interlocution (Bakhtin) or struggle for distribution (Marx), which are in the end identical as ways of recognizing—shaping—the human subject (Hegel).
In one sense, this didactic structure of “telling” stands in contrast to the more mimetic structure of “showing” that characterizes the ideal—at least the Jamesian ideal, as Wayne Booth represents it—of the bourgeois or middle-class novel that developed in the nineteenth century and culminated at the beginning of the twentieth with *Ulysses*. But in another sense, the didactic forms of the utopian and proletarian exhaust the possibilities or parameters of representation within which the bourgeois novel works. The radical novel lays bare the structure of the novel as such while exceeding the possibilities of the novel. This statement holds even in the case of a world-historical innovation such as *Ulysses*: my claim is not for the aesthetic superiority of, say, Steinbeck to Joyce but that what is being said (propositions or stories) and how it is being said (argument, discourse) are all comprehended in the structure of the radical novel. The claims that Joyce makes about Western literature, Western culture, the particularities of Dublin life at the turn of the twentieth century, etc.; and the stories he tells of culture and society—all of this may be understood in terms of Leopold Bloom our interlocutor, guide, protagonist.

But these remarks are in danger of taking the individual text, however expansive and paradigmatic, as the sole unit of analysis when the movement of the dialectic transcends the isolated text with the intersecting texts of genre. The truth of radicalism, an articulation of the narrative truth of literature and the propositional truth of philosophy—or the narrative truth of philosophy that is called recognition—can only be shown through the intertwined aspects of radicalism in the utopian and proletarian novels. To review and enrich the foregoing analysis, then:

---

52 See chapter two of Booth’s *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. 
The recognition of the utopian novel is the nature, however incipient and confused, of equality. The confusion is in fact constitutive of equality, which, as a special case of universality, follows Judith Butler’s logic that there are exclusions inherent in any assertion of universality. It would be an ironic mistake to charge that the utopian novel of the 1890s is static and dogmatic, since that accusation is an act of reification similar to that of which the utopian novel (as “classical utopia”) stands accused. Rather, the genre of the utopian novel is a kind of break with History that is ever greater, that encompasses more and more of humankind. Although a conservative “utopia” is a contradiction in terms, insofar as conservatism means continuity with rather than break with History, a radical utopia is not necessarily progressive in the sense of more inclusive, as the history of fascism’s association with syndicalism has shown. The important difference between the utopian recognitive relationship of equality and the “bourgeois” Hegelian account elaborated by Honneth is that the universalizing tendency is intrinsic to the utopian break. It is the demand that creates utopia rather than some contradictory element in institutions, or what Honneth calls the “surplus of validity” (Redistribution 149-50). Utopianism is the name for the drive of ever-more inclusive, ever more universal, egalitarianism. In addition to this difference, the egalitarian utopianism of the 1890s, as specifically socialist form of recognition, imagines an impossible ideal freedom to be enacted within the realm of necessity. In this it sets itself against the Hegelian bourgeois “realm of actualized freedom.” Its imagination of new institutions, however, fails. It becomes vague and therefore non-utopian to the extent that it cannot conceive of something other than an invidious system of recognition, an egalitarianism tied to the wage system, and an individualism caught between Nietzscheanism and liberalism: each a reductio ad absurdum of identity-formation within capitalist society.
The “proletarian” aspect of the 1890s utopia is ambiguous. The question is whether the good society of Bellamy and Howells, Donnelly and Gilman presupposes some act of revolution, or whether there is some kind of gentler break with the nineteenth-century capitalist status quo. The question troubled Bellamy, who, as I show in the preceding chapter, attempted to draw a line from the tumultuous past to the tranquil present in two ways. The first he called “evolution,” and presented this in *Looking Backward* a natural consequence of capitalist monopolization of industry, which the people finally affirmed and transformed, by vote, from “private capitalism” to “Nationalism,” in which the state would be the only capitalist. The second he called “revolution,” stressing less the natural process, the continuity of consciousness, and more the more radical transformation in thinking upon which the vote for Nationalism depended. The important ambiguity is that, on the one hand, Bellamy acknowledged the need to give a more radical accounting for the subversion of capitalism that would have to take place to bring about socialism: thus the shift from the term evolution to revolution, yet the maintenance of the view that revolution could be brought about by a change in consciousness, by non-violent means, and by the whole (in the limited way in which Bellamy would define the whole) body politic. Yet the word revolution, and Bellamy’s contention that the transition to Nationalism was indeed the first genuine revolution, is saturated with anxiety about, and connotations of, Marxist change from one epoch to the next. While Marxism saw the proletariat as becoming coextensive with humanity, Bellamy saw the citizenry itself (such as it was, exclusive of women and people of color) as representative of humanity. The logic of radicalism, in which a world-historical transition would come about through the agency of a group that comes to represent all of humanity, pressured Bellamy to use the Marxist term revolution, and a bourgeois stand-in for the proletarian agent of history.
Yet the proletarian agent of history is no more universal than the bourgeois agent of history; if the logic of the bourgeoisie produces the proletariat, the universalizing logic of the proletariat, by its very tendency towards exclusion, produces the truly universal class of the lumpenproletariat. The (lumpen) proletarian novel, as a successor form to the utopian novel, at once tendentious and mimetic in its telling and showing, attempts to resolve this aporia of the utopian novel and to synthesize an egalitarian socialism with a theory of recognition. The two, as we have seen, are *prima facie* and typically opposed in their logic, since egalitarianism seems to emphasize sameness and recognition difference, egalitarianism what is common and homogeneous and recognition of what is special in the individual or in the group (bound as the case may be by a common “race,” culture, sexuality, gender, etc.). Below I will develop in more detail, returning to the example of the I.W.W., a rapprochement between the apparently opposed sameness and difference of egalitarianism and recognition.

As I showed above, the concept of equality is different from the concept of identity. According to Stefan Gosepath, equality is consistent with difference; it is defined only by similarity with respect to this or that feature shared between two or more entities (in this case, persons) (Gosepath, section 1). There is no inconsistency between egalitarianism, which, in the sense I am using it, is a matter of equality or worth based on the shared fact of humanity, and recognition, which is a matter of worth based on attributes (capacities, talents, and other particularities) that are not shared. But the crucial transition from egalitarianism to *egalitarian recognition*—the truth of a “lumpenproletarian recognition,” the truth of a “radical recognition”—comes in the concept of a non-invidious acknowledgement of the worth of a particular individual’s or group’s attributes.
This transition or mediation (1) lays the groundwork for a compromise between the traditional “economism” or centrality of class struggle in socialism and “intersectionality” that comes out of the identity-political critique of socialism and (2) rejects the notion that (a) capitalism lies at the root of all forms of exploitation and oppression and that (b) socialism is the supersession of all of those forms. The concept that mediates between economism and intersectionality is the lumpenproletariat. The lumpenproletariat was defined negatively by Marx as a de-classed class, the contradiction in terms of an economic phenomenon expelled from the economy, become an affront to or challenge to the economy, whether conceived as socialist or capitalist. The lumpenproletariat is therefore radical, in both its quiescent and catalytic versions, in the most dangerous way. It becomes the principle of the kind of exclusion from universality of which Butler speaks, the expulsion that returns to expand on the false universality that expelled it (Butler “Restaging” 11).

At the same time, it must be repeated that the lumpenproletariat is no salutary phenomenon, no thing to celebrate, but the inhabitant of a grotesque realm of freedom; its utopian aspect, however, is its absolute inclusion. That inclusion is epitomized in its relationship of love: for the whore, the orphan, the beggar, etc. The labor of the negative, the labor of those in society who do not work, is expressed through a form of love that either (1) lacks all partiality, is as anonymous as the ecstatic encounter with a prostitute; (2) celebrates particularity that is of no social worth, such as the idiosyncrasy of the bums at the Y.M.C.A.; or (3) affirms the worth of those whose lives are in fact opposed to and detrimental to society, such as Norah and Cass McKay. Love, then, is paradoxically the relationship that seems more fully than an abstract equality to exemplify and to concretize egalitarian recognition. Love sublates equality and shows its essential harmony with recognition. It is a genuine recognition in contrast to interpellation.
because of its fundamental status, prior to the interpellative institutions of capitalist society, prior
even to the Lacanian structures of imaginary and symbolic on which Althusser modelled his
theory of interpellation. This is so because of the independence of love from any economic, state,
or cultural expression. By this I do not mean that the radical recognitive love of which I speak
evades “domination” or “subjection”: by asserting the coextensiveness—even identity—of these
latter relations with human relations as such, Althusserians and their Foucaultian progeny lay
down a doctrine that no empirical observations can count against; hence, rather than falling into
the trap of looking (empirically) for institutions or practices that evade domination or subjection,
the critic of Althusser or Foucault is better served to call the love exemplified by the whore,
orphan, and bum not a supersession of domination or a liberation but both a complaint against
domination and the hope of a world in which domination will cease.

This world, it must be said, has no determinate content. The freedom of the
lumpenproletariat is the freedom of subjects who, whether dominated or not, produce nothing
and, as Marx and Engels put it, express their freedom by being “thrown hither and thither” by
radical forces. “Radical,” as the dilemma of the competing claims of Communist Dill Doak and
the fascist Nubby O’Neill illustrates, is radically indeterminate, consistent with both left, right,
and quiescent—or a negation of all of these symbolized in the openness of Algren’s denouement.
Only solidarity, the final horizon of the radical novel and the utopian consummation of the
project of universality, can make determinate the form of radicalism implicit in the freedom of
the lumpenproletariat. The lumpenproletariat, then, as a form transitional between distributive
justice and recognitive justice, brings the two together in a radical fashion: an egalitarian
recognition that is a break with the two paradigms. Radicalism is in fact the synthesis of
distributive and recognitive justice, and that synthesis may be called solidarity.
These novels, then, utopian and proletarian, ostensibly socialist or strictly a matter of distributive justice, and hence outmoded or rendered obsolete or at least one-sided by the “post-socialist condition,” can if synthesized under a radical aspect present us with a synthesis of distributive and recognitive justice. If, then, utopia is, from Plato to Ursula K. Le Guin, the attempt to grasp justice in the most comprehensive possible way, and recognition and (re)distribution together exhaust that attempt at comprehension, a theory that articulates—or, to go further, that synthesizes—recognition and (re)distribution is a contemporary image of utopia. In its dialectical movement, the radical novel is a view of revolution; in its totality, the radical novel is a view of utopia.

In conclusion, I want to suggest what that synthesis means in practice, for it is easy enough to state abstractly that one has resolved an aporia of the theory of justice, but quite difficult to specify what a society would be like in which that resolution occurs. The key distinction that I want to first observe and then break down is that between organizing and organization. Roughly, these phenomena correspond to the proletarian and utopian principles, respectively. Organizing is the process of bringing about the just society; organization is the state of the just society. By state here I do not mean to imply state in the sense of nation-state, or state as an institution of authority. But I do mean that organizing is the dynamics of establishing institutions and organization the achieved institutions themselves. However, if we take the I.W.W. as a kind of utopian model of society, then the process of organizing and the state of organization converge, for the state is nothing but the process of producing institutions. Institutions are constantly on the make, constantly subject to critique and transformation. Organizing constantly produces organization, which in turn is subject to organizing. It is in this sense that organizing as a process turns out to be organizing as a break. The process of
organizing constantly breaks and remakes institutions. Just as the utopian and proletarian principles exist in dialectical relationship, organization and organizing take place in dialectical relationship. Here, then, I want to emphasize what has been implicit in this dissertation all along: that the two principles go beyond their class-based significance, their rootedness in the agency of the proletariat or the bourgeoisie; or indeed in some abstraction of humankind to which proletariat and bourgeoisie aspire; but to the declassed significance of organizing and organization as such. Perhaps this déclassement runs the risk of emptying the process of political transformation of its determinate ethical significance, emptying it of any particular ideological or ethical agenda. The risk, then, is that the “radicalism” of this study, if abstracted of its utopian and proletarian content, would accommodate any manner of ideological positions, e.g., even fascism; for, as Gregory Claeys observes, the claimed universality of “actually existing socialisms” have depended on scapegoats fully as much as fascism has, and both socialism and fascism have exploited the radical model of syndicalism.\(^{53}\) I take the most complete conceivable universality to be the condition, not merely of déclassement, susceptible as it is to being thrown hither and thither by reaction or revolution, but of a classlessness whose conditions of possibility are non-violence and a break with the necessary logic of history. This classlessness may be termed democratic socialism or given the name “radicalism”; at any rate I take the vision of the I.W.W. to be a good image of what this radicalism might look like: raw material for a utopian model of organizing and organization.

\(^{53}\) Claeys’s remark was made during a talk at the 2014 meeting of the Society for Utopian Studies.
II. The I.W.W. Model of Society

In what follows, I offer an I.W.W. model of society—the dynamic organizing of society and the static organization of society via the proletarian and utopian principles—both as exercises of the utopian impulse, for indeed the I.W.W. exhausts certain unexhausted possibilities of socialism in terms of both proletarian and utopian principles and recognition and redistribution. “Organizing” and “organization” correspond roughly to what I have been calling the proletarian and utopian principles. The contradiction between the two drives the continued striving towards justice.

The I.W.W. avoids the Marxist distinction between first and second stages of communism in favor of a single state of the “Co-operative Commonwealth” or “Industrial Democracy”—where the Commonwealth might be called the organization and the Democracy the organizing aspects of the new society. In his pamphlet “The Evolution of Industrial Democracy,” (an undated publication perhaps of the 1910s) Abner E. Woodruff, C.E., begins with an answer to the Socialist objection to blueprints for a “Co-operative Commonwealth.” This Socialist interlocutor contends that “we cannot say now just what form the “new society” will take—the workers will decide that question when the time comes” (Woodruff 3, bolded words here and hereafter in original). Woodruff replies:

The purpose of the ‘Revolutionary Working Class’ is to build and use an ‘Industrial Democracy’—a form of society based upon man’s necessity to harmonize himself with the method by which he produces and distributes his living. The writer does not contend that this can be following any ‘cut and dried’ line of action, or that the new society can be built to a ‘ready made’ plan, but he does contend that since human growth moves along certain lines towards better
conditions, a study and understanding of the changes that have taken place in the past will indicate the changes that are yet to occur. (3-4)

The reason that there are not two stages, the dictatorship of the revolutionary working class and the democratic withering away of the state, is that such a democratic condition already obtains. Before describing the content of this Industrial Democracy, Woodruff makes the startling claim that “The new society exists. It is. The task before the working class is to free this new society from its bonds—to lead it out into the brightness of the day—and the more there are who realize this task the sooner the event will occur” (4). Three aspects of this claim that the new society exists are worth noting. Woodruff claims here that the organization to which the I.W.W. strives is implicit in its own method of organizing. Here we have the I.W.W.’s utopian (but empirical) emphasis on the already-actualized state of the hoped-for society. We also see a gesture back to Bellamy’s simultaneous commitment to “man’s necessity” and to a contingent “task.” Finally, Woodruff’s image recalls the original utopian movement from the bondage of Plato’s cave to the freedom of the daylight. “It is” may be taken in the sense of Ernst Bloch’s “not-yet-being,” and it may be taken in the sense of empirical description. How to harmonize this contradiction? The Industrial Democracy exists within the I.W.W. but is not yet universalized; the I.W.W. is an island of freedom within the realm of necessity. This is not to deny that the I.W.W. was usually engaged in the run-of-the-mill struggles for shorter hours and higher wages; the fact that this is so demonstrates the paradox in the utopian rhetoric of the I.W.W.: radical change or revolution, a free break with history, rooted in non-violent progress or evolution. This paradox is expressed in the Hegelian formula of the transition from quantity to quality.
However, Woodruff strangely maintains an epistemological gap between the present and what lies beyond Industrial Democracy: “Beyond that [Industrial Democracy] I do not go,” he declares. “The great Future I leave to the future—it has always taken care of itself” (4-5). It would seem that this modesty about the Future betrays a lingering eschewal of the Marxist renunciation of prediction; yet Woodruff has already insists that his regime bypasses the transitional period of dictatorship. He has made a concession to the Marxists but will not compromise on the democracy of the I.W.W. vision.

The fact that the new society exists does not preclude Woodruff’s urging of measures to bring about the new society. In fact, that urging and those measures are constitutive of that new society. The working class demands education; they “must undergo a training for voluntary co-operation in production…” (36). The means of bringing about industrial democracy, however, is unexpected; while the I.W.W. avoids the violence and repression of the Marxist revolution, it also diverges from the liberal path to classlessness, electoral politics. Woodruff reasons that the working class cannot bring about “the change” through electoral means, because the change “can properly occur only after the working class has been thoroughly marshalled, drilled and disciplined for the event…” (37). At this point the I.W.W. has its special functions to fulfill. There is a continuity of praxis and structure in the “three functions” the I.W.W. is supposed to fulfill: “First, to oppose and break down the power of the master class; second, to build the new society within the framework of the present society; and third, to operate as manager of the productive forces and director of the social life of the new society when emancipation shall have been achieved” (40). The praxis moves from present to future order and from destruction to creation. Praxis, however, is not exclusively the radical activism—direct action, strikes, sabotage, etc.—characteristic of the I.W.W. but also the practices of
The modern industry, for “The machine method of production will determine the form of the new society, and human relationships (the great Association of Happy Working Men) will be determined by the industrial method of wealth production” (43).

This maintenance of the industrial method is a crucial sense in which the transition to the new society has already happened; the organization of the I.W.W. is not Woodruff’s emphasis here; rather, it is the organization of the factory. The I.W.W. does not plan to reverse history and eliminate Fordism. Unfortunately, Woodruff does not elaborate on what he means by the determination of human relationships by industry. Woodruff seems to be claiming, following Marx, that there is a special kind of solidarity introduced among human beings by the industrial method. These relationships need not be taken for reifications or commodity fetishism; there must rather be a dialectical relationship between the industrial method and the solidarity to which it gives rise. The latter is both a consequence of and countervailing pressure on the other. If Woodruff depends on Marx here, however, it is important that Woodruff imagines the post-revolutionary future as still dialectical, still riven by conflict. For the “freedom” in “realm of freedom” does not entail the end of conflict but rather the openness to fresh forms of conflict, new determinate contradictions. This is perhaps the reason that Woodruff maintains that Industrial Democracy may be predicted while the great Future is left alone. Finally, however, Woodruff diverges from the economism of the Marxist dialectic. His own I.W.W. dialectic appears in a triad of factors, not in any straightforward base/superstructure determinism: “Machine production, the social consciousness of humanity, and the industrial form of social organization; these are the bases of the new society” (45).

It is not clear so far, however, that Woodruff is any more determinate in his predictions of post-revolutionary than Marx or Engels is. Woodruff requires the new society to involve
“democratic” ownership and control of the “means of life,” with “the worker a joint owner and administrator with his fellows…” (43). The difference from Marxism here is the I.W.W.’s rejection of centralism. The prediction of democratic ownership and control, however, is no more specific than Engels’s insistence on a dictatorship of the proletariat.

Woodruff envisions a universalization of the “public service” designation for all workers. He predicts that government will cease, “there being no servile class to be held in subjection—but in its place will be an ‘administration of affairs’ based upon universal economic and social equality” (44). He is utopian when discussing pay. “Remuneration,” he proposes, is a function of the “‘man-day’—the average production of an average man in an average day when working under average conditions…” (43). It should be objected here that this model of remuneration conflicts with the I.W.W. Preamble’s call to “abolish the wage-system,” and the Preamble is the sacred text printed on the back of many I.W.W. publications. Indeed, it appears on the back of Woodruff’s pamphlet. On the other hand, in accordance with the decentralization of Wobbly power structure, the Preamble itself gives a utopian leeway to theorists to predict the future and to envision the work of the I.W.W. variously. B.H. Williams’s 1913 editorial “The Constructive Program of the I.W.W.” recommends that “This program should be debated, studied and understood by I.W.W. members first of all” (19). At the same time that he makes his proposal, he invites disagreement about it. This possibility of disagreement was inculcated not only in the I.W.W. publications but in the Work People’s College in Duluth, Minnesota. This school was “managed since 1916 either by members or friends of the I.W.W., but it welcomes workers of all social convictions; for the class of discussion is essential to adult workers’ education” (“Work People’s College”).
The problem of unemployment illustrates this possibility for reasoned disagreement, most importantly on this crucial difference between first and second stages of communism. A pamphlet apparently from the 1920s, “The Unemployed—What Shall They Do?” proposed an eight-hour day to reduce the “standing army of jobless men and women” (1). This proposal seems quite in accordance with the “man-day” idea, however. A 1933 pamphlet “The General Strike for Industrial Freedom” radicalized or negated the eight-hour man-day, calling for a three-hour day (the additional five hours, reasoned the anonymous author, were only the production of surplus value) (42). Perhaps, then, Woodruff is reproducing the Marxist succession of first and second stage of communism, with his policy of remuneration confined to the first stage, implying in the great Future the possibility of a movement beyond the wage system characteristic of Marx’s second stage. The way this ambiguity about the wage system actually seemed to function in I.W.W. discourse is to open space, not for a negative freedom, but for the process of disagreement that is constitutive of the decentralized structure of the organization itself.

In the undated I.W.W. pamphlet “Decentralization vs. Centralization,” the anonymous author seems not only to be responding to the tendency towards centralizing authority inherent in “All Labor Organizations of the past (the Knights of Labor, the W.F. of M. [Western Federation of Miners], the Socialist Party, the S.L.P. [Socialist Labor Party], and all others), but to a debate internal to the I.W.W. itself, a tension between the two tendencies (1). The author contends, counterintuitively, that there is a contradiction between “chaos of CENTRALIZATION” on the one hand and order on the other (1). Centralizing authority is the cause of disorganization; a self-

55 The pamphlet probably dates from the 1910s, because in its catalogue of other labor organizations and radical parties it does not mention the Communist Party, which came on the scene in the 1920s.
disciplined working class, on the other hand, is the decentralized principle of organization. The very reason that the working class fails to be organized is a consequence of centralization. The thesis of “Decentralization vs. Centralization” implies that the decentralized messiness of organizing is in fact a necessary condition for a viable organization. But the pamphlet articulates a constitutive contradiction between centripetal and centrifugal movements in the I.W.W., a fundamental argument on how to organize. However, the common ground on which decentralism and centralism (the tendency of Thomas Hagerty’s Wheel of Fortune, for instance) meet is the rejection of the state. The debate between centralization and decentralization, or the efforts at a rapprochement between the two, allow for a utopian play in the concrete details of the prediction and planning of a future society. The significance of the pamphlet on decentralization, then, is not the meager content of its argument (which consists more of vague assertion than detailed progression) but its indication of the play within the basically anti-authoritarian leaning of the I.W.W. Like many pamphlets, the Preamble is printed on the back.

To sum up so far, then, a single-stage framework for Industrial Democracy and an insistence on decentralization provide conditions of possibility for more concrete utopian proposals to be discussed presently. If the I.W.W. contrasted with the Socialists by its willingness to speak of the post-revolutionary future, ironically it was accused of being strictly negative, critical, and destructive with respect to the capitalist status quo rather than have a positive program. In a 1913 editorial in “Solidarity,” B.H. Williams responds to this criticism that “our organization is committed ‘exclusively to a program of violent destruction’; ‘the I.W.W. would destroy society and industry, leaving nothing but chaos in their place’” (Williams “Constructive Program” 12-13). In response Williams says the I.W.W. aims to “BUILD CONCRETELY THE WONDERFUL STRUCTURE OF INDUSTRIAL SOLIDARITY” (13).
That Williams uses “solidarity” rather than, say, “society,” is significant, for the former word suggests interpersonal recognitive relationships rather than fixed institutions. The structuration that Williams proposes in what follows, then, must be understood against the backdrop of person-to-person relationships.

Williams expresses the centralizing tendency of the I.W.W. in this theory of its structure. The most intimate of the I.W.W. economy is the single shop, or “ONE SHOP BRANCH…” (14), all of which are in turn bound together into an “INDUSTRIAL BRANCH UNION,” e.g., all textile workers (15). The industrial union elects executive officers, who hold conventions that affect all unions (16). The branches are grouped into departments: the Department of Agriculture, Land, Fisheries and Water Products; the Department of Mining; the Department of Transportation and Communication; the Department of Manufacture and General Production; and the Department of Public Service (17). I list all of these departments here for a number of reasons. First, the system of departments illustrates the dynamic between centralization and decentralization. Second, the system shows a difference between syndicalism and anarchism, a way in which the economy might be organized independently of the state. Third, the departments show harmony and hierarchy, complementary work, without total subsumption. “At bottom,” the discussion of departments concludes, “all the working class co-operates with or aids directly or indirectly any group of workers in performing its function” (18). The pamphlet calls this “one co-operative commonwealth” (19).

To return to the point that prediction of the future guides praxis, one might say with the author of this pamphlet that an affirmative vision, rather than a mere negative freedom, is what is the real threat to the status quo (the French Revolutionary Terror, after all, was unsustainable):
“And it is this CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAM that alarms the masters and their retainers more, than all the ‘loud talk’ which they attribute to the I.W.W. agitators” (19).

In the preceding chapter I rejected Vincent Geoghegan’s and Krishan Kumar’s attempts to claim that a “utopia” could be constructed out of the concrete details of a communist society to be found scattered here and there in Marx’s writings. The primary reason for my argument against these two scholars was that these concrete details turn out to be merely negative stipulations: what society will not be, rather than what it will be. Yet a second reason, which I want to highlight in the present context, is that a utopia is a coherent vision, a totality, just because it is an alternative to or island within the realm of necessity. When I appeal across a variety of texts to establish the nature of the I.W.W.’s “utopia,” then, I am not trying to patch together some ideal society absent from the visions of the I.W.W. I am rather looking at the debate within the I.W.W. itself that is based on (1) empirical observation, (2) concrete predictions; and (3) a convergence of theory and praxis. If Woodruff’s distinction between the new society being already here and the great Future taking care of itself resembles the two stages, positive and negative, of Marx’s view of the future, it is a consequence of the fact that Woodruff wants to maintain the position that utopia is within our grasp at the same time as he avoids an a priori limitation of the utopian imagination. While affirming a democratic socialism, he wants to preserve a certain epistemological and ethical humility: an unknowable progress beyond our present ethical imagination may be possible. (I use “ethical” here advisedly, for ultimately the I.W.W.’s rejection of politics stands in contrast to the ubiquity of the political and rejection of the ethical that is characteristic of Marxist theory. If political antagonism ever ceases, the ethics of classlessness will still be relevant.)
To return, then, to the debate among Wobblies as to the nature of utopia. The common ground of this debate is that the I.W.W. model must begin from the “shell of the old.” Accordingly, one pamphlet speaks admiringly of Henry Ford’s “flowsheet” of production and proposes an I.W.W. “social flowsheet, not merely as the Ford engineers do for turning out a few trucks, but to replace the no longer workable profit motive by a planned economy of plenty” (“Revolutionary Industrial Unionism” 2). But this new economy is but “the logical continuation of the daily struggle of union men for better conditions, higher wages, and shorter hours” (4).

This emphasis on continuity must be balanced by the equal emphasis throughout I.W.W. literature on the idea of a break with the present. The tension exists here without resolution, and it will not do to call this pamphlet a mere reformist as opposed to revolutionary strain of the I.W.W., for at the same time it maintains that “we can no longer content ourselves with the half loaf program of ‘A fair day’s wage’. We will have to choose between a whole loaf or none” (p. # needed).

Yet all of the preceding discussion seems to presuppose a kind of “economism,” an exclusive emphasis on matters of distribution rather than recognition. The very universality or capacity for inclusion that characterizes this economism, however, shows the potential for the accommodation of a theory of recognition to complement the emphasis on distribution. The I.W.W. was famous for its disregard for the distinction between the “skilled” and the “unskilled,” but occasionally its literature included solidarity even with white collar workers: “The planning and production [in post-revolutionary society] is the job of workers of various degrees of training, some with overalls and some with white collars, but it is never the job of politicians, evangelical orators, currency cranks or other parasites. These are superfluous—the excrescences of the body social” (“Revolutionary Industrial Unionism” 2). Most statements of the I.W.W.’s
universality were limited to “blue-collar” workers. But here the logic of the I.W.W. is pushed further to include white-collar workers, and arrives at an aporia maintaining both universalism and the friend/enemy opposition. Another tract, “The Revolutionary I.W.W.,” published in 1921, reflects this ambivalence. “This pamphlet,” writes the anonymous author, “is addressed to the men and women who work for a living,” who perform “socially useful labor,” including even accountants (3, 11). The matter of universality is bound up with the matter of recognition. Universality is at once a principle of distributive and recognition justice. It underpins distributive justice insofar as the latter’s principle is egalitarian and inclusive; yet universality is recognition insofar as its inclusion encompasses particular individuals and groups that constitute or fragment humankind. The I.W.W. never articulated a stance on recognition, but my point here is that its “economism” did not rule it out and that, indeed, its universality, by encompassing particular subdivisions as well as the whole of the “masses,” implied the necessity for a rapprochement of recognition and redistribution.

III. The I.W.W. Model Today

It is not feasible or productive to appropriate a Wobbly model of society today in all of its concrete detail: the twenty-nine industrial unions, the five departments, even—taken literally—the General Strike itself. Yet that model offers certain enduring principles that can inform a structure of society and practices of recognition:

1. The enabling principle of all principles that follow is the breakdown of the distinction between organizing and organization. The positive expression of this principle is the unity of organizing and organization, or the constant process of challenging and remaking institutions.
2. A corollary to (1.) is the rejection of stages of socialism and the demand for a post-revolutionary society now. This is different from some disastrous Maoist program of forcing socialism on a society not prepared for it. Rather, this demand depends on a further principle:

3. The continuity of present and future, or current and alternative economy. Utopia is a break with history in the sense of being an immanent alternative rather than some apocalyptic sublation of history.

4. A “revolutionary education,” as Eugene Debs puts it, as an enabling condition of (3.) (Debs 47).

5. The balance of decentralization and structure in society.


7. The inculcation of solidarity in addition to individualism in the workplace.

8. To follow on (7.): the equation of that solidarity with society.

9. The General Strike as figure for the equation of solidarity and society.

These principles necessarily fail as conditions for utopia, because they fall short of the status as concrete measures. It is significant, however, that not even the pamphlets or agitprop of the I.W.W. specified these measures. The concretiae of I.W.W. literature were the decisions based on the exigencies of the moment, and the struggles for the eight-hour day or better pay were nothing to scoff at; indeed they were utopian for their own moment.

Importantly—and contrary to opponents’ accusations of violence—the I.W.W. emphasized non-violent revolution. Although they did at times advocate the destruction of property or “sabotage,” the 1933 pamphlet “The General Strike for Industrial Freedom” distances itself from the violence of the Communist Party, whose members think “that they can
control and direct to constructive ends the sinister forces in the Pandora box of civil war, which they see eager to release upon a land whose language they hardly know how to speak” (35). The xenophobic tinge to this last clause would be hard to deny did the author not, soon after, insist that, in contrast to Socialism and Communism,

The I.W.W….ignores national boundary lines and views the problem [of liberation (?)] from the standpoint of the closely knit and organically related, world-embracing interdependence of the producing class. The I.W.W. contends that ‘hands across the sea’ must be the hands of industrial workers and not politicians. Nothing more forcibly proves the correctness of this position than the world war. (“The General Strike” 37)

The rejection of violence was consistent with the World War I era pacifism that cost the Wobblies so dearly.

As I suggested above, there is finally no practical distinction between “organizing” and “organization” in the rhetoric of the I.W.W. According to B.H. Williams, “Tactics are inseparable from organization. Therefore let us study and work to build the organization that, while striking capitalism its death blow, is at the same time preparing to put in the place of capitalism a new and better society” (“The Constructive Program” 20). It might be objected again that the practical function of the I.W.W. was nothing other than the proposal of the crucial but non-revolutionary demands for shorter hours and better pay. The local strike, which occurred in places like Goldfield and Paterson, was the main means of winning these demands. The burden of the I.W.W. literature’s discussion of tactics, by contrast, is the general or

56 I owe this observation to a comment made by NEA organizer Donald Brooks.
revolutionary strike. In this sense the gap between the ordinary strike and the general strike represents the vast difference between the organizing of the present and the organization of the future, even if the latter form of organization was already implicit in the old society. On the one hand, this gap might be thought to falsify the revolutionary rhetoric of the I.W.W. On the other hand, this gap can be taken as affirming the revolutionary potential of this or that strike. “A strike,” said William Haywood, “is an incipient revolution” (17). This remark came during the question-and-answer time after the end of his talk on the general strike; during that talk, as noted above, he had explained that not even the conditions for an industry-wide strike had obtained by 1911 (for him 1877 or 1886 did not count). Finally, however, there was no such opportunity for falsification of Haywood’s claim about the strike being an incipient revolution. The I.W.W. and its strikes did not exist long enough for its claims—these are claims not only in the sense of predictions but of “having a claim on” someone or group—to be borne out or debunked. But the ferocity of the opposition to the Wobblies lends some plausibility to Haywood’s remark. During the brief prominence of the I.W.W. the fear of the new society was as strong as—in the end, perhaps stronger than—the desire for it. And perhaps those who defended the old society were no more dupes than those who organized for the new. They knew the power of the I.W.W.’s claim.

The preceding chapter on the radical novel concluded that the structure of utopian organization was nothing other than the structure of organizing; the open space of the future for Marxism yielded to the dense space of present praxis. However, it turns out that the I.W.W. utopian vision of the future in turn displaces the present to the future and, if it thereby sketches an answer to the question of the post-revolutionary future, it leaves open the question of present praxis.
IV. The Catholic Worker

There is a danger of fetishizing a lost possibility of history, or a break with history that never succeeded in turn to break the continuity of history. Yet I suggest that this is less risky than to leave a utopian dream at the level of dream, abstracted from the waking world. So I would like to turn again from the I.W.W. to another group that it influenced but that made its strategic adoption of pacifism into a full-fledged politics of nonviolence. In its resolute yet pacifist break with History, the Catholic Worker provides a model of organizing and organization that draws on both traditions of socialism and that carried on the legacy of the I.W.W., distinguishing itself from all other movements of its time, from the 1930s to the present. Against the Communist Party it was resolutely pacifist; against liberalism it affirmed its own particular values; against the New Left it maintained its commitment (though not exclusive commitment) to issues of class. Yet I want to focus not on its negation of or distinction from other trends in the Left but on its own affirmation of alternative forms of life. If the ultimate principle of the I.W.W. was solidarity, the Catholic Worker’s ultimate principle is love. This is not the nascent recognize love we saw in the novels of the lumpenproletariat, but a self-conscious radical love that sublates all other forms of recognition.

The significance of love is its capacity to unite considerations of distributive and recognize justice. The core of the practice of the Catholic Worker is sharing of the available resources, yet what motivates this sharing is the particularity of this or that individual, this or that individual relationship. The Catholic Worker takes the abstract and false universality of the utopian novel and expands it through the relationship of love. By this love it meets the intersectionality test, for Day relates how the individuals encountered on farms and in the houses of hospitality are not in practice treated equally in an abstract way, as if everyone needed the
same “credit,” or that material resources would be a sufficient guarantee of egalitarianism, but in accordance with the particular needs of individuals and their relations. Thus love comprehends and resolves the oxymoron of “egalitarian recognition,” with its simultaneous indistinction between individuals and its recognition of particularity.

The Catholic Worker is, to be sure, utopian in a sense similar to that in which More’s original Utopia was utopian: it is an island. “What we would like to do,” Day writes in 1946, is change the world—make it a little simpler for people to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves as God intended them to do. And to a certain extent, by fighting for better conditions, by crying out unceasingly for the rights of the workers, of the poor, of the destitute—the rights of the worthy and the unworthy poor, in other words—we can to a certain extent change the world; we can work for the oasis, the little cell of joy and peace in a harried world. We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever-widening circle will reach around the world.

(Day Selected 98)

It is a community or solidarity of communities set apart by its own principles and practices. The sense in which it is a realm of freedom within the realm of necessity is its communism enacted through voluntary poverty. Poverty is indeed a set of constraint, yet if it is affirmed as a form of life it is a freedom. Day makes a distinction between the voluntary poverty of minimal but adequate goods and the “destitution” of involuntary poverty with inadequate goods (Selected 111). Making love the ultimate principle inverts the form of bourgeois society—from nascent to ultimate form of recognition. Because the Catholic Worker’s form of life is always bound to the island of a particular community but is potentially universal, it is neither
“imperialist” nor “developmentalist.” It is a universality that acknowledges that universality will always be partial; thus the totalizing danger of universality as well as the self-satisfaction of a false universality are averted. By its affirmation of particularity as well as universality and its modesty in the face of the demand for universality, the Catholic Worker meets the intersectionality critique.

Earlier in the same essay that describes the small “oasis” that the Catholic Worker actualizes, Day declares that “We are working for a Christian social order” (Selected 91). Therefore, while Day acknowledges that such an order will only ever be partially realized, it remains the goal. The “catholicism” or universalism of this order accounts for the most glaring exclusion inherent in the Catholic Worker. In practice, the organization excludes no one, not even atheists. Yet the rhetoric of—or commitment to—Christian doctrine is the central contradiction of the Catholic Worker as surely as the rhetoric of I.W.W.’s “workers” as opposed to the scapegoat, the parasitic class of capitalists, constitutes an exclusion and a failure of universality. It is not, as in the case of the I.W.W., a decision on the categories of friend and enemy, yet it is an insurmountable obstacle for many of those who do not identify as Christian.

How does the Catholic Worker measure up to the principles of the I.W.W.?

1. **Breakdown of the barrier between organizing and organization, or, unity of organizing and organization.** There is no bureaucracy in the Catholic Worker. The organization’s very existence is a “demonstration.”
2. Rejection of the stages of “communism.” The Catholic Worker began in 1933.
3. An immanent alternative.
4. A revolutionary education: the “easy essays” of Peter Maurin, the continuity of writing and praxis; the identity of the Catholic Worker and *The Catholic Worker*.

5. The balance of decentralization and structure: the common vision without a common authority of the farms and houses.

6. Lacking the “flowsheet” of production. *Indeed, in this rejection of totalization the Catholic Worker enacts the utopian break with history more faithfully than the I.W.W.* On the other hand, the Catholic Worker depends on the support of those invested in society. It could not exist without those existing in “the world.”

7. The inculcation of solidarity in addition to individualism or individual responsibility.

Peter Maurin’s doctrine.

8. The general strike as figure for the equation of solidarity and society. The general strike is another figure for the break. The Catholic Worker on principle supports strikes.

The exigency remains for an I.W.W., a Catholic Worker, a utopianism, that in its status as an island makes its ultimate concern humanity as such, excluding the categories of the sacred and the enemy; this concern is the universal asymptote represented most compellingly by the lumpenproletariat, the classless transients that the I.W.W. organizes and the Catholic Worker is.

**V. Writing and Praxis**

Dorothy Day had the street cred a literary critic lacks who asserts that writing—whether critical or literary—is a kind of praxis. But as Robert Ellsberg writes, Day “herself was reluctant to draw distinctions between ‘writing’ and ‘doing.’ ‘Each is an act,’ she once said. ‘Both can be part of a person’s response, an ethical response to the world’” (‘Introduction’ to Day *Selected* xviii).
When I say that literature is a realm of freedom, I am not repeating some utopian platitude that Marxists such as Fredric Jameson or the early Terry Eagleton have decisively debunked. Nor am I calling writing—literature or literary criticism—some decisive intervention in the realm of necessity. If there is such a thing, it is organizing. But I am claiming that (1) the act of literary representation takes place in the realm of freedom because (a) it is a mimesis of the world yet (b) it is a defamiliarization of that world. And (2) the act of representation takes place in the realm of freedom, because neither practices of such organizations as the I.W.W. or the Catholic Worker or any other group, nor the principles that may be derived from those practices, can substitute for the narratives in which those practices and principles are embedded. Here I return to my notion that (3) the act of representation is at once propositional and narratological, and indeed that the radical novel lays bare this double aspect: it is the act of representation par excellence.

William Haywood’s 1911 talk on the general strike illustrates this contradiction between the freedom of language and its lack of efficacy for certain forms of practice. The occasion for the talk was a benefit for the defense of a shoe maker, Vincent Buccafiori, a rank-and-file I.W.W. member accused of murdering his foreman. Buccafiori had quarreled with the foreman, been dismissed from his position. Later, introductory note of the pamphlet published by the Buccafiori Defense Committee maintains, Buccafiori was threatened by the foreman with a heavy shoe last, at which point Buccafiori shot the man in self-defense. The Defense Committee claims that the motive for the firing was Buccafiori’s unionizing activity for the I.W.W. The eminent Big Bill Haywood surprisingly begins with an apology that he cannot do more to help the hapless Buccafiori as he was helped, because of his fame and esteem, to escape his own conviction for murder a few years earlier: “I am sorry,” said Haywood, “that I can’t bring together the forces
that saved my life. I can only speak here as an individual” (Haywood 7). Yet he assumes a rhetorical challenge that, in a way, is just as great, for, a moment later, he announces that “I came here to-night to speak to you on the general strike” (7). Haywood quickly admits that he is no Jaurès or Kautsky, that “I am not here to theorize, not here to think in the abstract, but to get down to the concrete subject of whether or not the general strike is an effective weapon for the working class” (8). At that, Haywood launches into a history of the general strike. Speech and writing are in a sense impotent to intervene in the world, yet at the same time for Haywood, a veteran of the United Mine Workers, the Socialist Party, the I.W.W., their theorization provides the preconditions for that intervention. And I have argued that the radical novel is a chance not merely for abstract theory of but for concrete narration of revolutionary conditions. Further, those conditions are not limited by history, nor by Haywood’s three stages of the strike, but indeed move beyond history in the fourth stage, the revolutionary general strike that is both the instantiation of classless society—just because these conditions take place in the fictional realm of freedom. In this sense, as both proposition and narrative, and as both history and break with history, the radical novel is the act of representation in the fullest sense of the word, a mimesis and defamiliarization of a world that is in the final analysis hopeful.

VI. Radical Novel and Critical Utopia

And so finally I want to turn to a fictional story that stitches together in proposition and narrative form the truth of egalitarian recognition. In its complex historical situation and its converging concerns of recognition and redistribution, Meridel Le Sueur’s The Girl is emblematic of the whole discontinuous history of the American Left—that history of breaks with History.
Portions of *The Girl* were published in the 1930s, but the entire book as we read it now was not published until 1978. The title character (who is called only “Girl”) moves to the city of Minneapolis during the Depression to find a job; meets a man, Butch, who has resorted to scabbing and to whom she loses her virginity; subsequently becomes pregnant; participates with Butch in a bank heist during which Butch is fatally shot; gets involved in an all-women community of a chapter of the Workers Alliance, and finally births a child. The men in the novel having met disaster in the attempted robbery, the women turn to a work-based solidarity and childbearing: two forms of labor. As Nora Ruth Roberts writes, “the act of birth becom[es] an act of solidarity that supersedes male society” (137). Roberts’s reading unites considerations of Old Left and New Left. She comments that “Le Sueur never disowned the proletariat….She finds, however, in the proletariat, especially in the voice of proletarian women, a voice for the repressed, a source of solidarity stronger than the united force of men marching, stronger even than the force of heterosexual partnership” (137).

The Workers Alliance facilitates a feminist revision of revolutionary praxis. It obviates scabbing, stooling, and crime, resisting the realm of necessity that appear to compel these measures while affirming a realm of freedom, an alternative form of life. In this sense, the Workers Alliance is utopian, because it moves beyond class and gender conflict even while making “demands” for milk and iron pills. Organizing prefigures a realm of freedom from within the realm of necessity.

The warehouse where the women of the Workers Alliance live, maternal bed and mimeograph side by side, anticipates a new kind of community as well as a new kind of women’s identity. But we can see Le Sueur in the tradition of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s utopia

---

57 Here my reading draws on discussion with John Marsh.
Herland of 1915 (not published in book form until 1979), and the radicalism of both becomes clear. Together they constitute what I mean by the radical novel. If Le Sueur anticipates a specifically gendered classless society, so Gilman makes a gendered class struggle a precondition of her classless society. In the history of Herland, first the invading army kills off many of the men; then the slaves revolt, killing the men and many of the women; and finally the young women remaining kill the slaves: the history of Herland is a series of revolutions (Gilman 47). Both texts, The Girl and Herland, revolve around revolution, either looking forward to it or backward. And Le Sueur’s women’s community is in a sense already a classless society, just as Gilman’s women’s community finds itself thrust again into the possibility of revolution, the confrontation between the men’s so-called “bi-sexual” capitalist society and the socialist society of women. Struggle and achievement—class struggle and classless society—exists in both texts, but it takes a dialectic between the two to reveal it and constitute the radical novel.

To affirm that the Workers Alliance or Herland both superimpose justice and the strife towards justice is not to deny the flaws of these forms of life. The revolutionary preconditions of Herland, and the eugenic conditions of its progress, are indeed terrible. The content of Gilman’s utopia, by turns sophisticated and barbaric, can be distinguished from the formal aim of the utopia, which is ideal. Le Sueur does not aim at an ideal. The very innocence of the Girl, a stupidity somewhat sentimentalized, and her fumbling advance towards a more just form of life, is a deliberate flaw in Le Sueur’s utopianism. Ideal and non-ideal are internal to the radical novel. The ideal and the approach towards the ideal, Herland and The Girl finally agree on the goodness of a kind of virgin birth—in the sense of a birth free of any original sin or the residue of the realm of necessity—and Le Sueur would insist, against the practice of the Herlanders, that the birth of even the lowly is righteous. But here the proposition of the utopian and proletarian
novels is one and the same. Medicine and housekeeping are equally prestigious. Love is the name of the reproduction of the conditions of production of this new regime of prestige. Knowledge of the future, the nature of this regime, is possible to the extent that we enact justice—distributive or recognizable—in the present. The radical novel is a great proposition or story that sketches a socialist theory of recognition or a break with history.

The principle of revolution that joins Le Sueur and Gilman is what ensures a certain utopian perfection but also introduces the “ambiguity” of imperfection—only a society that is radically flawed could be the subject of revolution. The transformation celebrated by both Gilman and Le Sueur is the act of birth—labor at once an act of recognition and a loss of innocence for both, an entrance into the praxis of womanhood at what Gilman calls “the edge of the world,” or that newly permeable barrier between the utopian and the real (77). Marge Piercy’s work, *Women on the Edge of Time*, breaks down that barrier as well; it is, however, a work that Tom Moylan in his *Demand the Impossible* describes as a “critical utopia,” in the sense that it deliberately criticizes the flaws of the society being presented and, by implication, denies the possibility of a perfect society. The critical utopia, argues Moylan, sublates the form of the classical utopia, the tradition of “a static blueprint of the perfect post-revolutionary society” that extends roughly from Thomas More until World War I (83). If this traditional utopia is marked by the attempt to present perfect justice, the critical utopia is so named for its self-critical or skeptical aspect, its “awareness of the limitations of the utopian tradition” (10). In the sublation of the utopian tradition, the critical utopia performs that peculiar Hegelian process of “destroy[ing], preserv[ing], and transform[ing]” the utopian tradition (43). The content of the traditional utopia is thus called into question: changes in mode of production and political power make the workerism of the pre-WWII left outmoded (11). In moving beyond workerism, the
critical utopia inspires a multiplicity of oppositional strategies: “The task of an oppositional utopian text is not to foreclose the agenda for the future in terms of a homogeneous revolutionary plan but rather to hold open the act of negating the present and to imagine any of several possible modes of adaptation to society and nature based generally upon principles of autonomy, mutual aid, and equality” (27). The target of Moylan’s criticism seems to be more Bellamy than Gilman, since for Bellamy a change in the organization of labor solves all the problems of society, including the “woman question.” For Gilman, though, a revolution in the means of reproduction must supplement—or largely supplant—the revolution in the means of production. But the contrast between Bellamy and Gilman, at any rate, reveals that the traditional utopias are not monolithic but characterized by their own ambiguity, even if this ambiguity is not criticized within the novel itself. Indeed, Moylan seems to acknowledge this affinity between Gilman and the critical utopians in his comparison of Herland to Joanna Russ’s The Female Man (56, cf. 197). The two share a “concern…not so much with the fixed structure of social institutions as…with the fluid practice of everyday life and human consciousness in a society where those who have been oppressed, particularly women, live free of their oppression” (56). These connections that Moylan inspires hint at the possibility of a dialectic that preserves as well as destroys—a dialectic already instantiated in Le Sueur’s novel.

---

58 Piercy envisions “the collective struggle of a people across cultures and time. This struggle is represented not by a white, male, professional leader but by an alliance of common people of all races and cultures, connected across past, present, and future by the continuing history of the social revolution…” (125).

59 Cf. Moving the Mountain (1911), which follows the traditional structure of Bellamy’s utopian dialogue rather than the fluidity of narrative of Herland.
A dialectic between radical novel and critical utopia could range from theory to practice, from the condition of possibility for a critique of society to the means of transforming society. The dialectic internal to the radical novel—that is, between utopian and proletarian principles—already frames the question. Must one begin with an ideal yardstick, a society purged of domination, in order to measure how far existing society falls short of a just society, a society in which goods are distributed properly and individuals are respected? Or can one work out a provisional critique, by approximation of or striving towards justice? Gilman begins from the stability of the ideal, calling the contingency of injustice into question. Le Sueur presents a fragile Workers Alliance-in-progress, an alternative but not ideal polis that nonetheless provides a marked contrast by which to judge the injustice of male-dominated society outside. I submit that both are necessary: one to give an idea of what justice must be like and the other to discourage the dangerous delusion that it can be perfectly accomplished.

But the contradiction between the two possibilities, ideal and non-ideal critique, is contained explosively within the individual text of the critical utopia. The credibility of Piercy’s critique of repressive institutions of mental health and women’s health derives not only from a vision of the just society—Mattapoisett—but from the time traveler Connie Ramos’s own acute sense of suffering under these institutions. As powerfully as Le Sueur she objects to the indignities to which the social worker subjects Connie, the welfare recipient; as indignantly as Gilman Piercy condemns domestic violence. The advantage of the radical novel’s answer to the question about the condition of possibility of critique is that it makes no compromise between non-ideal and ideal, struggle and achievement—there is no time traveler to mediate between them.
In order to take advantage of all possibilities of the twentieth-century left, to consider what both the utopian and Marxist traditions as well as the New Left and its descendants have to offer, one must begin from a kind of liberal common ground, not with the presumption that the post-war legacy trumps that of its predecessors. The dialectic of the radical novel, after all, is a matter of finding the proletarian in the utopian, and vice versa, rather than (as Engels argued) making the former sublate the latter. By the same logic, the New Left and subsequent movements for recognition no less than Neo-Marxist movement towards a refocusing on class should be placed in a kind of egalitarian dialectic. This dialectic, or solidarity, finds a nodal point in the text of Le Sueur’s *The Girl*. The logic of liberalism—of a Hegelianism tempered by Bakhtin—indeed is thus one key to the narrative of radicalism. *Herland* is a kind of critical utopia *avant la lettre*. And the critical utopia is a kind of radical novel, an attempt to think and to narrate both revolution and achievement of revolution within the same text. It is important that the dialectic of the critical utopia not sublate the dialectic of the radical novel. A Bakhtinian certain dialogue between radical novel and critical utopia is necessary to prevent Stalinism to coopt the pre-WWII tradition of a radical literature, or Bellamy’s sunny “forecast” to prove the falsity of the pre-WWI tradition. A dialectic of destruction of previous moments in socialist thought and storytelling is an impediment, not an answer, to repudiating the bad and preserving the good of the pre-war tradition, because it suggests that we can leave behind and move beyond the problems of the past, when one of those problems just is the notion of progress. Progress destroys the past, not just the old status quo but the radical resistance to it as well. Articulating the whole history of the radical novel—relating it to the bourgeois novel, the critical utopia, etc.—can give an account of the whole history of radical literature in America, the histories of Socialism, the Old Left, the New Left, and contemporary left, that can argue with each other as
well as find common ground. This way of looking at the history of socialism punctuates History through a continuous narrative of history. To think of the history of the Left as an articulated whole, and as a simultaneous struggle for socialism and an instantiation of that socialism, is an inspiration to praxis and a way of acknowledging the limitations of praxis.
Works Cited


---. “Reconciliation under Duress.” *Aesthetics and Politics*. 151-76.


Walter P. Reuther Library I.W.W. Collection, Box 162.


Walter P. Reuther Library I.W.W. Collection, Box 162.


---. *Waiting for Nothing.* *Waiting for Nothing and Other Writings.* 5-129.


    *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge.* Ed. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave.


“Revolutionary Industrial Unionism.” No author or date. Trifold flyer, apparently published by the I.W.W. Walter P. Reuther Library I.W.W. Collection, Series __, Box 171.


Walter P. Reuther Library. Accession number 130, Series ___, Box 171.


Robert Z. Birdwell

Vita

Education

B.A., English and Philosophy, University of Tennessee, 2009
M.A., English, Pennsylvania State University, 2012
Ph.D., English, Pennsylvania State University, projected May 2016 (defense October 12, 2015)

Publications

“The Coherence of Mary Barton: Romance, Realism, and Utopia.” Victoriographies 5.3 (Fall 2015).